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Studies of Great Bible Characters

By

HENRY T. SELL, D. D.

*Author of The Sell Series of Bible Studies
for Adult Classes*



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Foreword

THIS book is a short course, through the Old and New Testaments, of twenty-one "Studies of Great Bible Characters."

There is here presented a number of biographies of men who were the outstanding and strategic leaders of their own times. They not only moulded the thought and directed the action of the ages in which they lived but to-day are even more influential.

They realized, were profoundly influenced by, and worked enthusiastically for ideals and principles which still lead us on. They had their faults. They were very human. They made mistakes, of which they bitterly repented, but above every other desire was that of bringing in the kingdom of God on earth; this is their glory.

Their problems, under other guises and in different circumstances, are our problems. It is of great interest to us to see how they worked them out in order that we may be better able to solve ours.

These men were hardy adventurers on the sea of life, who, buffeted and beset by violent storms, still came safely to port, with rich cargoes. How they did this will richly repay the most careful study. In their successes they rise above their nationality and become of interest to the people of every nationality and every age.

An effort is here made not only to get at the

underlying truths and principles which guided these men but also to set forth the practical lessons, in them, for us, to-day.

Of the importance of this sort of study Dr. W. L. Phelps, Professor of English Literature in Yale University, says in a recent book, "I thoroughly believe in a university education for both men and women; but I believe a knowledge of the Bible, without a college course, is more valuable than a college course without the Bible."

This book is intended to be added to and take the eleventh place in the author's "Ten Books of Bible Studies." It is to be used as they have been in the Adult Bible Class, Schools, Colleges, private study, etc. The author is profoundly grateful for the large favour with which his former books have been received.

HENRY T. SELL.

New York, N. Y.

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I

ABRAHAM .

THE MAN WHO DARED TO TRUST GOD

A New Beginning was made in the history of mankind with Abraham. He stands out as a commanding figure. He was of the same stuff that great leaders of men and explorers are made. He had daring. He had splendid executive ability. He was large-hearted and far-sighted. He would have made an eminent statesman or victorious general had the opportunity presented itself. Yet he is known for none of these qualities which are written large on the face of his career. He is known, however, as "The Man Who Dared To Trust God" upon what seemed to be a bare promise. He left kindred and home and country upon the call of God—the God whom his neighbours did not know, and did not care for. He was a pioneer Pilgrim facing a new land with new and difficult things to meet and conquer. He headed a new order of a spiritual kingdom of those who strive to obey the "Inner Voice" and to be not only worshippers but friends of the "Living God." A Gentile, he was the founder of the Israelitish Nation. The name "Israel" was first given to his grandson, Jacob.

The Environment of any man is often looked upon as having much to do in shaping his life. Favourable circumstances make favoured men.

Unfavourable surroundings keep men down. Such is the theory. But this theory did not work with Abraham. He lived in the midst of the basest kind of idolatry yet of an advanced civilization. Chaldea, long before the time of Abraham, was a well-settled country. There were great cities with magnificent temples, splendid palaces, and extensive libraries. The arts were well known; there were skilled workers in fabrics, metals, stones, implements, weapons and armaments. Time was divided then as it is now. There was a post-office system; sealed letters could be sent. The parcel post was in full operation. The city of Ur was one of the most splendid of all the cities. It was the seat of the great temple of the moon-god. Looked at from the outside, nothing seemed fairer than this highly adorned civilization. But inside it was honeycombed with the basest sort of immoralities. The people's religion exalted the evils that destroyed all virtue, and finally killed the civilization. The recovered, dug-up, monuments of this age show that all the Bible says of this worst side of Chaldean civilization to be literally true.

Had Abraham been a product of his, this, environment we would never have heard of him. He was called to come out. He came out—to head a new movement.

The Significance of Abraham's life is religious. To miss this is to miss the whole meaning of the narrative. While other men seek for glory, or honour, or simply to live comfortably, Abraham is desirous only of obeying God. It is a singular fact that

of the many eminent men of his times—mighty kings, merchant princes, eminent scholars—Abraham's name alone has attained universal fame.

The Account of Abraham's life is found in Genesis 11:26–25:10. The salient features, by chapters, are: *First*—chapter 11:26–32—Birth of Abraham. Removal of Terah with Abraham and his wife, from Ur of the Chaldees to Haran. It seems to have been the intention of Terah to go to Canaan but he only got to Haran and died there. *Second*—chapter 12—Abraham receives his call with its promises and blessings.

He leaves Haran for Canaan with his wife, Sarah, and his nephew Lot. Shortly, finding a famine, he goes down into Egypt. *Third*—chapter 13—Abraham returns out of Egypt to Canaan. He becomes very rich. There is strife between the herdmen of Abraham and Lot. Abraham to settle all disputes offers Lot his choice of land. Lot takes the best and in doing so pitches his tent toward Sodom. *Fourth*—chapter 14—Battle of the kings. Lot is taken prisoner and is rescued by Abraham. *Fifth*—chapter 15—Renewal of the great promises of blessing and prosperity to Abraham. *Sixth*—chapters 16 and 17—The desire of Abraham and Sarah for a child. *Seventh*—chapters 18 and 19—A child is promised Abraham and Sarah. The destruction of Sodom is foretold to Abraham. He pleads for the city but it is so evil that even Abraham gives up. Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed while Lot is saved. *Eighth*—chapters 20 and 21—Abraham goes to Gerar. A son is born to Sarah. *Ninth*—chapters

22 to 25:8—The asked-for sacrifice of Isaac. Getting a wife for Isaac. Death of Abraham.

The Call of Abraham (12:1-3).—What was it? How did he become aware of it? Was it an audible voice? No one can answer these questions because Abraham is not here to tell us. We know that whatever it was, and however it was given to him, he acted upon it to the extent of completely severing all his relations with his former associates and going to a far-away land with his wife, his nephew, Lot, and his retainers. He journeyed southward to Canaan. For a man, seventy-five years old, with fixed habits, it was a big change. We do not read that he ever returned to Haran, even to make a visit. He did not go to better his condition in the world, or for honour, or preferment, or for the sake of adventure. It was for conscience' sake. At the time it seemed to him that he was giving up everything, except his immediate family, and going into certain physical hardships, but he was more than willing if God wanted it so.

Elements of the call:

First: It was a call to face difficulties which from their unknown character seemed to assume a terrifying aspect.

Second: It was to advocate the cause of God whom no one knew anything about and whom no one cared about. If His cause prevailed it meant the destruction of the old religion of the land. It would brook no compromises. In these days we do well to think of what a radical change this meant in all departments of life.

Third: It was to break up the old and valued associations of years.

Fourth: It was a call to stand for that which violated all the social and national customs.

Fifth: It meant the founding of a new spiritual order and the building up of a nation to carry on this new work. Why? What we see now, and that which every schoolboy knows, about the utter destruction of the old and evil civilizations of Babylon and Assyria and all those old nations, God foresaw when He called Abraham. He wanted a man to do this work, which He knew must be done, and He selected Abraham to do it.

The Promises to Abraham.—Men are always trying to get other men to do things for them without any compensation. They attempt to drive sharp bargains. They strive to buy in a cheap market and sell in a dear one. Whenever possible they cut wages. Those who work for wages too often strive to do as little work as they can while, at the same time, they endeavour to advance their pay. This makes the hardship of life. There is enough for all but a few try to corner the market—to get all they can and to give back as little as they can. Not so God. Read carefully the promises God made to Abraham and note how much He promises him and how often the promises are repeated. Note also, as we can note now, after all these years, that there is not one single promise that has not been more than redeemed and made good.

We count at least six of God's promises to Abraham. *First*—chapter 12: 2, 3—"And I will make of

thee a great nation, and I will bless thee and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." *Second*—chapter 12:7. *Third*—chapter 13:14 to 17—"And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth," etc. *Fourth*—chapters 15, 17 and 18 contain just one promise after another. *Fifth*—chapter 21:12. *Sixth*—chapter 22:17, 18—"That in blessing I will bless thee and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, or as the sand which is upon the seashore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Abraham, giving up all and not knowing how it would come out, has certainly been well repaid. This same thought of a liberal, and a rewarding God, runs all through the New Testament. See Matthew 25:34-40.

The Lapses of Abraham are recorded with equal fidelity with those of his excellencies. Take the case where he denied his wife because he failed to trust God to the uttermost—12:11-20—and received a lecture from the king of Egypt. There is no attempt to gloss over this account. There is this to be said of Abraham that he repents of his lapses and tries to do better. Many a man lapses and continues to lapse with no thought of doing better.

The Magnanimity of this great man is shown in his treatment of Lot, his nephew. *First*—chapter 13—Abraham permits Lot to choose all the best land for his share, when there is a dispute. He does not

even ask for arbitration. "You," he says, "take what you like and I will take what is left." Here is a man who will give up all rather than quarrel. *Second*—chapter 14—When Lot is captured and taken away by looters, Abraham does not say—"It serves him right for choosing the best land and leaving me the worst." He organizes a force to rescue Lot and rescues him. *Third*—chapter 18—Again, when Abraham learns that Sodom, where Lot lives, is about to be destroyed, he pleads for it.

The Man Who Dared to Trust God, not simply to say he believed Him but to trust Him implicitly, is this same man Abraham. He cast himself out on His promises and went out "not knowing whither he went." But he went because God told him to go. That was enough. There is many a man, to-day, who feels that he ought to do certain things. He knows that God has spoken to him but he does not dare to do what he knows he ought to do. Life is a dare. It is a venture for every man. No one can predict the outcome of the venture. Business is a dare. Marriage is a dare. Religion is a dare. How do we know that the God in whom we believe will keep His word with us? We have to trust Him as Abraham did. We have to rely on His promises.

The Blessing of Abraham's Life!—Who can measure it? When God called Abraham, out from his country and his people, He is reported as saying, "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee and make thy name great: and thou shalt be a blessing." All this has been literally fulfilled. He is the father of a great nation. His name is great—

it is revered by the adherents of three great religions, The Christian, The Jewish and The Mohammedan. He has made it easier to worship and love God. He showed how a man can live uprightly under the most trying circumstances.

Questions.—What can be said about the new beginning God made with Abraham? What can be said about the environment of Abraham's life? What is the significance of his life? Give some account of the nine points noted in the account of Abraham's life. How did Abraham become aware of his call? What can be said of this call? What can be said of the promises? Are Abraham's lapses recorded with the same fidelity as his excellencies? What can be said of his magnanimity and of his daring to trust God? What can be said of the blessing of Abraham's life?

II

ISAAC

THE CHALLENGE OF OBEDIENCE

The Story of Isaac is told in Genesis 21:3 to 35:29. He did not have the striking characteristics of Abraham, or of his famous son, Jacob. He suffers, somewhat, from being placed between two such rugged, outstanding characters. Yet, in his own way, he is equally eminent.

His Youth was spent under very different surroundings from that of his father. His home-life was a sheltered one. As the son of a great man, of large influence, rich in gold, silver, land and large herds of cattle, he was treated with great respect and honour. He was subjected to none of the temptations of a heathen city, where the very temples of the gods invited to a dissolute life. His bringing-up was by a father and mother who believed in the one true God. He was the one through whom the promise of "The Blessing of the Whole World Was To Come."

The Choice of a Plan of Life.—No matter where one may be born or under what favourable or unfavourable circumstances, there must always come a time when the choice has to be made of a plan of life. The sculptor takes a lump of clay in his hands. He kneads it and moulds it. He holds it up and you

see the face of a satyr or a saint. Isaac, being of a meditative turn of mind, must have often pondered upon what he would be and do. How could he make his life count? So far as wealth was concerned—he was heir to that. So far as honour was concerned—every one honoured him. In deciding what to do there is the difficulty of having things, and the difficulty of *not* having them.

The Challenge of Obedience.—It is a singular thing that when a man does not openly choose for himself what he will be, and do, then the choice is thrust upon him and he is compelled to choose. This was the case with Isaac, as we shall see later. He had decision after decision thrust upon him. That he chose so well is greatly to his credit. There is a challenge to disobedience as well as obedience. The temptation to break out into prodigality—to burst the bands that bind us in our places—is inherent in many hearts. Some people call it the desire for liberty. Others give it a truer name in the desire for license. But much more than the challenge to disobedience do we have to meet the challenge to obedience—to keep within and obey the laws of physical, mental and moral health. To Isaac came the challenge to preserve, and build up that heritage that came to him through his father and his father's God.

Three Incidents in Isaac's Life show the temper of the man. We judge every one by the way in which he meets trials that are thrust upon him.

The First Incident is that of His Ordered Sacrifice.—The account of this is found in Genesis,

chapter 22. The first three verses read as follows: "And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I will tell thee of. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac, his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him."

The singular thing about this narrative is that Isaac seemed to understand the part he was to play, as the burnt offering, and yet he made no objection. He did ask his father where the burnt offering was to come from. But Isaac made no objection to be bound and placed upon the pile of wood in readiness for the knife and the fire. Here was a great challenge of obedience. Isaac certainly stood the test. In regard to this incident it should be said that in those times human sacrifices were common things in religious rites. It was a big thing for Isaac to submit. We revolt at it because of our long training in Christian principles. In regard to this whole matter Professor Phelps says in his book—"Human Nature in the Bible"—"I do not share in the common opinion that Abraham did wrong in offering up his son Isaac (and in Isaac's consent to be offered up). On the contrary it is one of the most splendid of all his recorded deeds. . . . There are to-day,

however, many conscientious objectors; they say that Abraham's obedience to God is fine, but when he was asked to give the life of his own son, he would have shown more nobility and righteousness had he flatly refused. . . . Yet men in our day not only consider it right to give the lives of their sons for what they regard as a higher call, but are universally honoured for doing so. What would be the general opinion of a man who, during the years of 1914-1918, had said, 'No; I love my son too much to sacrifice his life at his country's command; it cannot be right for a father to give up his own son.' Millions of parents followed Abraham's example in response to what they believed the call of duty. They not only did not feel any shame—they felt exalted. Do you remember President Lincoln's letter to the mother who had sacrificed five sons for her country?" All honour to Isaac who stood such a test as the one above.

It should be kept in mind, in reading this story, that the narrative shows that it was not the intention of God that Isaac should be sacrificed. It is related as a test and challenge of obedience.

The Second Incident is that of His Marriage (Genesis 24: 1-67).—This is one of the most beautifully written chapters in the Bible. It is a love story full of dramatic interest. Abraham is very desirous that his son shall be happily and well married—that it shall be a suitable marriage with one of his own station in life, and suited to him in every way. The narrative seems to imply that Isaac was fully informed of all the arrangements made whereby

Rebekah finally became his wife. Everything was aboveboard. There was nothing secret or clandestine in the whole affair whereby Isaac obtained a good wife. Here the challenge of obedience to right things was met once more by Isaac. He found happiness and great happiness inside the law of marriage in the regular order.

The Third Incident is that of Giving Up to Others.—The story is told in Genesis 26:17-22. It is the narrative of how Isaac's herdsmen dug a well to water their flocks and herds and their right to the well was disputed. They dug a second well and again their right was disputed. They left both these wells in possession of those who objected to their having them and went and dug a third well where they had peaceful possession. Here, again, we see Isaac meeting the challenge of obedience to a higher law.

What is the higher law? How does it work? There are three rules by which people live and have things. *First*—Get all you can and give back as little as you can for what you get. This is the attitude of the sponge, if the sponge can have an attitude. It is the soaking up of everything possible. Observing this rule makes for unhappiness and bitterness. *Second*—Give an exact equivalent for what you get—no more—no less. For a good word—give a good word. For an evil word—an evil word. For a blow—a blow. The man who observes this rule never gets on very far—he is always watching what the other man is going to do to him and he wants to be first to do the other man. *Third*—Do a little more

than is asked of you. Be a little kinder than is expected. Give a better bargain than the buyer looked for. Give up when your opponent does not expect it. Isaac seems to have fully understood and acted on this higher, or third law, in the case of the disputed wells.

Questions.—Where is the story of Isaac told? How does he differ from his father and son? What can be said about his youth? What about the choice of a plan of life? The challenge of obedience? What three incidents in Isaac's life show his temper as a man? What is the first incident and its teaching? What the second? What the third?

III

JACOB

THE SHARP TRADER WHO MENDED HIS WAYS

The World Famous Twins.—Esau and Jacob. Their birth and what they did, when they grew up, we find recorded in Genesis 25: 21-49: 33.

Characteristics (Genesis 25: 27).—"And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents." It is possible, from this and other descriptive passages, to get a very clear picture of what these men were like.

Esau, "a man of the field," a hunter with a quick ear and a keen eye; a hairy body burned black by the sun; no man knew the haunts of game better than he. But he lacked a sense of moral values. A son of Isaac and Rebekah and presumably—although not really—the heir of the promises given to Abraham—Genesis 25: 23—he would have none of the religion of his father and mother. He sought the society and companionship of the roistering Canaanites. He participated in their pagan rites and heathen dances. He took to himself two Canaanite wives. From start to finish of his career he is the same.

Jacob, "a plain man dwelling in tents." A shrewd man with a keen mind that can look far into the

future. He had great tenacity of purpose. He could wait—when he wanted anything—for years to get it. Witness his waiting fourteen years—and serving a hard master—to get his wife Rachel. In the matter of getting the birthright—before this—from Esau he waited for just exactly the right time and then he sprung the trap. He was a sharp trader with an eye, ever open, to further his own interests. He seems to have had two natures struggling within him for the ascendancy; that of the man who will get what he wants by fair means or foul and that which desires to be true to all that is right and good and to come into close personal communion with God. It is the struggle of these two natures—and the triumph of the better—that we watch in the record of his career.

A Birthright Despised and Sold (Genesis 25:28-34).—This is not only the story of an age-old transaction. It is right up to the minute. This morning—every morning—all the daily newspapers had it—with a change of names—on their front pages. It is the plot of “The Best Seller” and the latest magazine story. Inherited honour, truth, chastity, a good name, wealth—one or two or all—are in the possession of those who are willing to sell them and do sell them for a little sense gratification. The sharp trader, Jacob, is always ready to buy and does buy, as of old for a mess of pottage. The bitter cry of Esau, the victimized, is ever with us. The original story is that Esau came in faint, from hunting, and found Jacob cooking some red pottage. The smell of it was good to a man as hungry as he was.

He wanted some at once. Jacob, knowing his nature, that he would give anything to gratify his appetite, saw that the time was ripe to get the birthright. The bargain was struck. Jacob made Esau swear to the bargain. He did so gladly; for at the time he despised his birthright as a thing afar off. What cared he so long as he could satisfy a present appetite!

The Stolen Blessing (Genesis 27:1-41).—After the sale of the birthright the days come and go. Things seem much the same as before. A man crosses the line between evil and good, honesty and dishonesty, virtue and no virtue and seems to come back much as he was before. Why should he worry or fret himself about the payment for his indiscretions? Nothing has happened to him. In fact he counts himself quite superior to the man who does not cross the line between good and evil. So it must have seemed to Esau that after all he had got the better of Jacob, his canny brother. But wait! He has forgotten that the mortgage he gave on his birthright is about to be foreclosed. He cannot watch everything. His mother is looking out for Jacob. When she hears Isaac ask Esau to go and get him some venison, that he may eat and give him the “Birthright Blessing” before he dies, she is all attention. How Esau must have laughed to himself that although he had sold his birthright he would get it after all. Esau goes to get the venison. Meantime Rebekah gets very busy with Jacob and preparing a savoury meal, she fixes him up to represent Esau; sends him in to Isaac, who is deceived into giving him the “Birthright Blessing.” No excuse,

whatever, is given in this narrative for the deception of Rebekah and Jacob, in stealing the blessing. It is stated as a fact. Esau returns to find the "Birth-right Blessing" bestowed on Jacob, "And he cried with an exceeding bitter cry."

The day of reckoning had come, as it always comes. Esau begs and pleads and threatens but he has lost the chief blessing. Now he hates Jacob and threatens to kill him—forgetting that he, himself, is the one upon whom the blame should rest.

Breaking Home Ties (Genesis 27:42-28:22).—It is one thing when a young man voluntarily goes away from home to better himself. It is quite another when he is forced to leave home, on account of something he has done, that makes it impossible for him to remain. Jacob was forced out because of the threat of Esau to kill him. Jacob is now getting a little of his punishment—more later on. Rebekah, ever looking out for Jacob, advises him to go away for a while until Esau's anger shall cool. A virtue is made of the necessity and it is given out that he is going to Haran to get a wife. There is no enthusiastic send-off for Jacob. He goes out alone and unattended. His deception does not seem as good to him as it seemed a while ago. He has the "Birthright Blessing" but what good is it going to do him? It seems, just now, to be sending him out into a cold and unfriendly world.

A Wonderful Dream (Genesis 28:10-22).—The first night of a man away from home, who has never been away from home before, is very trying. Jacob was led to think of many things. He must have

wondered if, after all, he had been so very sharp and shrewd. He had doubtless prided himself on the way he had got ahead of thick-witted Esau but now he must have asked himself if it really paid—since his grasping nature had sent him out into a desert place. He was not nearly as sure of himself as he had been. Thinking these thoughts he fell asleep, with a stone for a pillow. He had a wonderful dream. There are those who tell us that our real nature comes out in dreams. There we come face to face with our real desires and hopes. It may be that humbled by his failure to get on through his shrewdness Jacob's better nature was coming to the front. Anyway he had a dream of a great staircase with the angels ascending and descending upon it and God standing at the top and declaring that He renewed for him the promises given to Abraham—Genesis 28:13, 14. Jacob here makes vows and a covenant with God. The better nature of this man is coming to the front. But he has to be sorely tried as we shall see a little farther on.

Serving Fourteen Years for a Wife (Genesis 29:1–31:55).—The shrewd, sharp trader meets sooner or later one who is shrewder and sharper than he is. A man who is always trying to get the better of other people will, in the end, find his match. In due course of time Jacob came to the home of Laban, his uncle, an exceedingly kind, affable man, who would assure you most cordially that everything he had was at your disposal and then he would turn around and fleece you of your last penny. Jacob fell in love with Rachel the daughter of Laban and

made a bargain with Laban to serve for her for seven years. When the seven years were up, Laban tricked him and he had to serve another seven years, without pay. The narrative as it goes on shows how, in sharp bargaining between Laban and Jacob, it was diamond cut diamond.

Back Home Again (Genesis 32:1-33:20).—Rich in flocks and herds, and with his family Jacob starts to return to the land of his birth. He is quite elated by what he possesses. He has done very well and he will exhibit his prosperity. He went forth with only his staff and now he returns laden with goods. Jacob sends messengers before him to inform Esau that he comes. He instructs the messengers to tell his brother of his flocks and herds and what an important man he has become. But when the messengers come to Esau, they find that he is on the march with four hundred men to meet Jacob. That is the answer to Jacob's boasting of his prosperity. It does not count at all with Esau. Jacob is afraid and rightly so. He finally arranges matters so that he will try to save his family. He divides his flocks and herds into bands so that one band after another shall meet Esau, as presents, and appease him, if possible. There is no disguising that he is in fear of his life and that of his family. All his arrogance is gone.

The Sharp Trader Who Mended His Ways (Genesis 32:24-32).—"And Jacob was left alone" after he had made all possible arrangements for the safety of his family. That verse accurately describes the position of Jacob. He was alone. His position,

his flocks and his herds, counted for naught. He felt stripped of all that he had so shrewdly and successfully worked for. He not only was alone but he felt the isolation. He expected nothing now but that Esau would do just as he had said he would do, years ago, kill him. He had no earthly friend to depend upon. He could do nothing himself. There remained only God. Take the narrative, as it is. God wrestled with Jacob. Jacob wrestled with God. What is there out of the way here? That man should wrestle with God for a blessing—to find, in the end, peace and comfort is an every-day occurrence. Men, who come to the end of their resources, must come to God. There is no other to whom they can come. Anyway, from this time on, Jacob was a changed man. He had mended his ways. His better nature he allowed to come to the front. His feet were on the upward path. God could and did use him, as He had not aforetime. He had prevailed with God and God had prevailed with him. The whole story is that of a man's giving his soul a chance, in being obedient to God, and in coming into communion with Him. Esau met Jacob in the utmost friendliness and would receive no present of him. If a man is right with God, he is right with the whole world.

The Success of Jacob was not so much in his wealth of land and herds as it was in what he was able to do with a naturally mean and grasping disposition. And the change in this disposition was not due to any particular resolutions or determinations on his part but to his being willing to follow,

whole heartedly, the promptings of his God. Jacob has his place to-day because of his success in his inner life.

Questions.—Where is the story of the world famous twins found? What are the characteristics of Esau and Jacob? What is meant by a birthright despised and sold? What can be said of the stolen blessing? How did Jacob come to break his home ties? Describe the wonderful dream of Jacob and what it was to him. What about the fourteen years Jacob served for Rachel? In coming back home what did Jacob desire to do first of all? How did the sharp trader mend his ways? What was the success of Jacob's life?

IV

JOSEPH

THE DREAMER WHOSE DREAMS CAME TRUE

The Life of Joseph, from the time he was seventeen years old until his death, is recorded in Genesis 37 : 2 to 50 : 26. He was the son of Jacob and Rachel. He has been called—"The Strongest and Most Lovable Character in Genesis." Aside from his own, individual career, he is an episode in the life of Jacob.

With Joseph closes the patriarchal line—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—and the tribal and national life of "The Chosen People" begins under Moses. We have here related how the way was opened for this chosen race to come down into Egypt and develop and grow strong, under the most favourable circumstances. Pharaoh favoured them in every way. Had they remained in Canaan during this formative period, they would not have been permitted to expand, the way they did, without exciting the jealousy and bitter enmity of their warlike neighbours. As it was, after they had multiplied to a great host and another Pharaoh was on the throne, the Egyptians tried to curb their growth by increasing their tasks and other means. But it was too late. They had become too strong. Strong enough to go through the grueling trial of "The Forty Years' Wandering" and to make

themselves, in due time, masters of Canaan—"The Promised Land," as it had been foretold.

The Shepherd Boy (Genesis 37:1-4).—His life reads like a romance. From the sheepfold he was raised, in a few short years, to be the chief ruler, under Pharaoh, of one of the mightiest empires the world has ever seen. But he had to take a course in the University of Hard Knocks which few would care to undertake even for so great a prize.

He is the favoured one of all the sons of Jacob. That favour is shown by a distinctive dress. It was the sort of coat that was the garb of the aristocracy and of the leisure class, while his brethren were clothed in the rough and ready clothes of shepherds. Seen together, he at once stood forth as the superior in station. No wonder that he aroused the jealousy and hatred of his brethren. Jacob ought to have known better. He ought to have looked back to his own boyhood and remembered his experiences with his brother, Esau.

The Dreamer (Genesis 37:5-11).—It is not at all strange that a bright lad, of seventeen years of age, should begin to think and dream of the future, of what he would be and do. Joseph had been clothed in a garb which showed, at a glance, his station above his brethren. He had been petted and pampered at home. What more natural than he should dream about his brethren coming and bowing down to him, in sheaves bowing down to a sheaf? It is exactly in the line of his bringing up that he should dream again of the sun and moon and eleven stars "making obeisance to me." Again we see the attitude of

Jacob in that he seems to acquiesce in the outlook of Joseph. Looked at, however, in the light of subsequent events, these dreams were literally fulfilled.

The whole question of dreams is a puzzling one which no man has been able to solve. Some dreams are the result of indigestion; some of our own hopes and fears; some of the favourable or unfavourable circumstances in which we happen to be at the time. But, after all the possible explanations have been made, there still remain dreams which we cannot explain; in these men are warned, encouraged and even given glimpses of the future. Modern thought does not encourage us to say much about our dreams or to rely upon them. Joseph, when he came to the place where his brethren and his father did obeisance to him, must have harked back to his dreams, when he was a lad seventeen years old.

Sold into Egypt (Genesis 37:12-36 and 39: 1-23).—If Joseph's distinctive dress aroused the envy and jealousy of his brethren much more his dreams so infuriated them that—"They conspired against him to slay him." An opportunity was given them to wreak their hatred upon him when Jacob sent him to them to see how they were getting along. As he came near Dothan, where they were feeding the flocks, they saw him afar off—"And they said one to another, Behold this dreamer cometh. Come now, therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams." Reuben saves Joseph from death by persuading the rest to put him into the pit.

The pit was a big jug-shaped cistern with a small mouth over which a stone could be placed. This sort of cistern was dug by the shepherds to store water for their flocks and herds. Escape was impossible for Joseph. Where were now all his bright hopes and anticipations? What of his dreams and his boyish boastfulness? He could cry out all he wanted to and no one would hear him. His brethren cared so little that they sat down to eat and drink. Such an experience is not uncommon in life. We are put into a pit of circumstances, by those whom we regarded as friends, from which there seems no escape. But the worst was yet to come.

Slave traders come that way. Joseph is taken out of the pit to be sold as a slave. The lad, set above the rest of the household, is now to feel the lash of the slave-driver's whip. Here is the crucial thing—will Joseph sink to the level of the slave? Will he give up his integrity and his dreams? It is not so much what happens to us, outside; it is whether it gets inside?

That Joseph was not embittered by his experience in the pit and being sold as a slave, is shown by the fact that he so conducted himself in the house of Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard, that he speedily rose to be the overseer of all he had. It doubtless seemed good to Joseph to have this recognition.

This prosperity, alas, was short-lived. Again he is cast down—this time into a loathsome Egyptian prison. For what? For standing out against a great temptation; trying to do the right thing for

himself and Potiphar. Falsely accused of attempting to do a wrong—he does not reply to the accusation—he understands the uselessness of it. This is not a rare case. One has sometimes to suffer, in silence, under an unjust charge or make things worse by speaking.

The Interpreter of Dreams (Genesis 40:1 to 41:36).—For two years Joseph remained in prison. There seemed no prospect of anything for him except this life. He had no outside influence. No one to help him except his God; to Him he turned in his distress. This was a critical period with Joseph, when the outlook was anything but encouraging. But pursuing the same policy that had made him overseer of Potiphar's house, and with the favour of God, he became the master of the prison—Genesis 39:21-23.

Now happened a series of remarkable events which showed that Joseph was not forgotten.

The chief butler and the chief baker of Pharaoh were put in prison. They speedily dreamed—the chief butler of a vine with three branches and of his pressing the juice of the ripe grapes into Pharaoh's cup—the chief baker also of three white baskets in which were all manner of bakemeats for Pharaoh. They were entirely at a loss to interpret the dreams, and were very sad. They gladly accepted Joseph's offer to interpret their dreams. To the chief butler he was able to say that within three days he would be restored to his place but to the chief baker he could only say that within three days he should die. The chief butler was elated. Within three days he was

restored to his place. Before he went out Joseph intreated him to remember him to Pharaoh and to bring him out of his prison house, but the chief butler forgot him utterly. It is not uncommon for people to forget favours. This narrative runs true to life.

Pharaoh had a dream of seven lean kine and seven fat kine that came up out of the river Nile, and the lean kine devoured the fat kine; and of seven lean ears and seven rank and full ears. No one could be found who could interpret the dream until the chief butler remembered how Joseph had interpreted his dream and his promise to help him out of prison. We all know how Joseph interpreted the dream to Pharaoh as it was that which God was about to bring to pass in Egypt—seven plentiful to be followed by seven lean or famine years.

Making Good as Chief Ruler of Egypt (Genesis 41:37-57).—Now at last the golden opportunity, for Joseph, had come. He pointed out the desirability of some man being chosen who would gather sufficient grain to tide over the lean years. Pharaoh chose him as that man. Look back and see that Joseph has been prepared and willing to be prepared for this great trust. He is a graduate, with honours, of Faith in God and the University of Hard Knocks. Did Joseph foresee something of this sort and prepared himself for it? He was a man of vision and an interpreter of visions. Every inventor has seen his invention, in vision, before he has seen it in reality. Edison saw his lamp, Wright his flying machine, Marconi heard his wireless messages before

they became realities. Why is it not possible for a man like Joseph, with infinite faith in God, to believe that God is preparing him for some great trust—some great place—when, after enduring hard trials, he graduates at the head of his class?

Many men, who in politics and in business have attained to high places, have told afterwards that when they were boys they determined to have these places. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and Joseph believed in God's promises unto the uttermost. The early dreams of Joseph are indicative of what he purposed to do and be.

There are four things which must be observed in making good in any work or profession. *First*—There must be the determination, the will, to do what one purposes to do. *Second*—Staying power—to remain in one's chosen pursuit, no matter what happens. *Third*—Reserve power; the accumulation of a reserve for unexpected emergencies. *Fourth*—Vision, the ability to see a thing, as accomplished, before it is done. These qualities coupled with his firm faith in God's ability to take care of him made Joseph what he was.

Joseph's Receptions of His Brethren and His Father (Genesis 42:1 to 50:26) constitute a separate story. They would take a study in themselves. We have only space to point out the fact that Joseph's rise to high position had not spoiled him. He was not vindictive against his brethren who had sold him into slavery. He saw everything that had happened, as it had turned out to the advantage of his people and himself.

Eight Strong Points in the Character of Joseph.
First—Supreme faith in God; his confidence never wavered. *Second*—Foresight; seeing things before they came to pass. *Third*—Evenness of temper; we never see him out of sorts. *Fourth*—Making the best of bad situations; in the pit and in the prison he is the same as in the chief rulership. *Fifth*—Keenness of mind. He had all the shrewdness of his father, Jacob, but it was turned toward helping others and not used for his own advantage. *Sixth*—Ability to cope with any and every situation. *Seventh*—Stability of heart and mind. *Eighth*—Dependability—Potiphar, the keeper of the prison, and Pharaoh placed all their interests, successively, in his hands, and they were taken care of to their satisfaction.

Questions.—What can be said of the life of Joseph; the way in which he was connected with the chosen people coming down into Egypt? How did Jacob show his favour to this shepherd boy? What can be said of Joseph as “The Dreamer”? What is there to be said of Joseph being sold into Egypt? Describe his first experiences in Egypt. What can be said of him as “The Interpreter of Dreams”? How did he make good as chief ruler of Egypt? What four things must be observed in making good? What can be said of Joseph’s reception of his father and his brethren? Give the eight strong points in the character of Joseph.

V

MOSES

LEADER AND LAWGIVER OF A NATION

The Need of Moses.—We turn from Genesis, at once, to Exodus and are apt to forget that between the two books there is a long space of time.

After the death of Joseph there arose a Pharaoh who became alarmed at the rapid increase in numbers and wealth of the Israelites. What Joseph had done in saving the nation, during seven years of famine, was utterly forgotten. This Pharaoh determined to break the spirit and to check the growth of this people. He burdened them with difficult tasks, gave orders to kill off all the boy babies, and reduced them to abject slavery. To a free people this subjection seemed very hard; and when they remembered the promises given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the favour that was theirs under Joseph it was by no means easy for them to bear the bitterness of their lot. Year after year passed and conditions grew steadily worse.

The Advent of Moses.—Even after the birth of Moses it is eighty years before he is called to deliver this people from a hard and bitter bondage. But in his birth events of tremendous importance, not only to the Israelites but to the world, are in preparation.

Moses stands out as one of the greatest figures

in the history of mankind. He was born in slavery; a slave mother concealed his birth that he might not suffer death under the decree of Pharaoh that all Israelitish boy babies should be put to death.

The **Great Task** given to Moses was to take a people which had been in Egyptian slavery—the worst that the world has ever known—with its hard work without pay and its cruel whippings—and make it into a great nation with the purest moral and spiritual ideals that the world has ever known.

He was called to a constructive work of the highest order. He was to be, so to speak, the president of the Sinaitic University with its various departments ably manned not with a four, but a forty years' course of study.

The task was threefold. First, Religious, to make a church with the underlying thought of one God, Father and Ruler of all. Second, Political, to make a great state or nation living under wise laws with high spiritual conceptions. A people which could survive internal dissensions and the rude buffetings of other nations. Third, Social, to keep the individual and the family pure and clean and in right relations. The principles set forth have never been abrogated.

With him the primitive and patriarchal period closes and we have the birth of a nation.

The **Career** of Moses is divided into three periods of forty years each.

The First Forty Years in the Court of Pharaoh.—It is summed up in just fifteen verses of the second chapter of Exodus. Most historians would have

made much of this period. Not so this recorder. He has much more important things on hand. We wish we knew more about Moses' mother who saved the life of her child and carefully thought out a way to preserve him from death and provide for his future. She was a real genius in planning.

As the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, Moses moved in the inner circle of the court life. There were four great temple universities—Memphis, Sais, Thebes and On. They were famous for their scholarship. It is probable that Moses was educated at the University of On, which is about five miles northeast of modern Cairo.

The allurements of court life, the learning, and the gorgeous ritual of worship in the magnificent temples of the Egyptians do not seem to have had any appeal for this young man.

We find all his sympathies and all his interest are for the despised race from which he came. Going out one day, as he doubtless had done very often, to visit his people, he sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew. It is too much for him. Doubtless hitting harder than he intends he lays low the cruel taskmaster. He thinks no one has seen him, but he learns very quickly that he is mistaken. For trying to help a fellow countryman, in distress, he is compelled to flee for his life.

The Second Forty Years on the Backside of the Desert.—What a change! From the active and gay life of the court of the mightiest empire of its times to the silence and monotony of the desert! Now he, **who** was so honoured and looked up to,

whose slightest expressed wish was attended to by fawning servants, is reduced to tending sheep. But if Moses ever regretted the change he left no record of his regret. There come times, in every one's life, when there is relegation to the backside of the desert but it is not always taken as well as Moses took it.

Moses in this period gained a knowledge of the desert which was of great use to him when he, afterwards, led the host of Israelites in their wanderings. This period is summed up in one short chapter—Exodus 3.

This period is brought to a close by the call, by God, out of the burning bush, to Moses to the work which marks the beginning of a great epoch in the history of the world.

The Third Forty Years as Leader and Lawgiver of a Nation.—A period crowded with important events so that four books—Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy—making barest mention of them are not sufficient to tell the whole story.

After the call of Moses he is, at once, sent to Pharaoh to demand the release of the children of Israel. Think of the surprise and bewilderment of Pharaoh! A fugitive, who has been hunted by his order, coming before him and demanding that he release a despised body of slaves! Moses does not come, as a suppliant, but as the ambassador of a higher power demanding and insisting that Pharaoh yield. Pharaoh is obliged to comply. Then follows the story of the making of a nation in the forty years of desert schooling.

The Key-note of the Three Periods is Divine

Leadership.—God ruling in and over the affairs of men. It is God who calls Moses to his task. It is God who sends Moses to Pharaoh with the demand that he let the Children of Israel go. It is God who directs the exodus out of Egypt. It is God for whom the wilderness tabernacle is erected. It is God who gives the ten commandments. He is fulfilling His promises to make of this people a great nation—through whom all the world shall be blessed and come to better things.

The Record of What was Done in the Third Period is set forth in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Exodus.—This book is a great turning point in Old Testament history. It marks "The first stage of the fulfillment of the promises made by God to the patriarchs with reference to the place and growth of the Israelites."

It should not be forgotten that God is here revealed as the God of the whole world and supreme over nature. He commands Pharaoh and the forces of the earth. A special nation is called, constituted and consecrated for a world-wide mission.

Leviticus.—The contents are legislative. The laws set forth are Moral, Religious, Civil, Ceremonial and Sanitary. The ten commandments are given to Moses. The great value of these laws is fully recognized to-day. The design of these laws is to stimulate the spiritual life and make a Holy Nation.

Numbers.—The account of the training of the nation. We are here told of what took place from the second year of the exodus to the arrival at the

border of the Promised Land—thirty-eight years. The name is from the double numbering of the people—first at Sinai, chapter 1, and then at Moab, chapter 26.

Deuteronomy.—Review of the law in sight of the Promised Land. Moses gives his parting instructions in three addresses. First—Remembrance of God's care. Second—Exposition of the law. Third—Renewal of the covenant. Some of the laws given in Leviticus are changed to suit the new mode of living from tent life to the settled life of villages and cities. A new generation has grown up, a new country is to be settled and new duties are before the people.

Questions.—What was the need of Moses? What can be said of the advent of Moses? How long after his birth did the deliverance take place? What was the task of Moses; its threefold character? Into what periods is Moses' career divided? Give an account of the first, the second and the third. What is the key-note of the three? What is the record—teaching—of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy?

VI

JOSHUA

THE COURAGEOUS MAN WITH A HARD TASK

Wanted—A New Leader!—This sign was out. Moses, the statesman, was dead. Great was the mourning!

When a man has been the successful head of a nation for forty years and dies in the full vigour of his powers, it is not easy to fill his place—Deuteronomy 34: 7, 8.

Ability to lead, in a great movement, is a rare quality. A man may have wealth, position, favouring circumstances, but these will all go for naught without this quality; with this quality he can create wealth, position and favouring circumstances and make them serve his purpose. Without good leadership a nation rapidly degenerates. Hence the anxiety, after the death of Moses, in regard to the new leader must have been intense. The position of the tribes was very critical. They could not go back. They were facing alert, dangerous, and well-armed enemies.

The Choice of Joshua (Joshua Ch. 1).—As we read the narrative we can realize the relief in the strain when it was announced that Joshua had been called to take the place of Moses. "As Moses was a statesman, Joshua was a soldier"—a general of eminent ability. His predominant qualities were

strength, courage, far-sightedness, faith in his God and in His cause.

The call came from God. How? We cannot say. We follow the text. But it is true to-day, as it ever has been, that many a man, engaged in a large and important enterprise, has felt this direct call to his work. With the call to Joshua there came the assurance—1:5—that God would be back of him; and the exhortation—three times repeated—to be strong and of good courage—1:6, 7, 9.

Personal Equipment.—We always like to know something about men who have done big things—stepping out of their nationality—in the history of the world. Joshua was a descendent of Joseph of the tribe of Ephraim—1 Chronicles 7:20-27. He was born a slave, in the brick fields of Egypt, and he knew the bitterness of slavery. He was with Moses in the forty years' wandering in the desert. He was selected as the commander to defeat Amalek when he fought against Israel, at Rephidim—Exodus 17:8-13. He was also chosen to go with Moses when he went up "into the mount of God" to receive the tables of stone on which were written the commandments—Exodus 24:12, 13. It was the logical and natural thing that the new leadership should come to him. He was well prepared to respond to the call.

The Situation.—Let us visualize it, as Joshua saw it.

On the east side of the Jordan, to the north of the Dead Sea, the host of Israel is encamped. It is orderly. It is well disciplined. The encampment is

by tribes. The streets are well spaced. On the parade grounds—of which there are a number—there is constant drilling of the soldiers. Let us disabuse our minds of the fancy that there was no effort required of the Israelites when difficult things had to be done and that all they had to do was to call on the Lord and a miracle would be performed. It is not so set down in the narrative. They had to work hard. It was well known that it would be no easy task to subdue the Canaanites.

On the west side of the Jordan were the Canaanites dwelling in many scores of walled cities and with a multitude of fierce fighters.

The Work to Be Done was to dispossess the Canaanites and to possess the land. Could it be done? That was the question that troubled everybody from Joshua down to the smallest children who could understand what was up.

First—To dispossess the Canaanites. Why? For the same reason that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. Read Genesis 18:20–19:25. This dispossession is always represented in the Bible as a punishment for wickedness. Nineveh, Babylon and Jerusalem also went down for their sins. The Canaanites worshipped every evil thing. In one word it was a religious cult exalting immorality. Recent excavations and researches show that “No other nation has rivaled them in the mixture of blood and debauchery with which they sought to honour the Deity.” We have no sympathy with the disorderly house and the gambling hell when raided by the police—why should we express it for the Canaanites

who were far worse? Joshua was taking no chances when he prepared his campaign. He knew that the worse the evil the harder it would fight. It is a mistake too often made that all you have to do is expose evil and the cure is effected. Not so—it hits back and uses every mean weapon that it can get hold of. The Canaanites were skilled warriors. They had the arts of civilization, as then known. They inhabited walled towns and cities. They were strategists and fought by fair means and by foul.

Second—To possess the land. To do this Joshua well knew that he would have to be wise in peace as well as in war. To conserve the fruits of victory is often more difficult than to win them.

The War Plan, of Joshua, displayed the ability of a great general. There were three military campaigns.

First—"The Central" against Jericho and Ai—chapter 6. This was a blow right in the center of Canaan. It divided the forces of the enemy into two camps—"the Southern" and "the Northern." This made it more easy to deal with the situation.

Second—"The Southern" against the combined kings of the South—chapter 10.

Third—"The Northern" against the combined kings of the North—chapter 11.

In chapter 12 we have an account of the kings which the children of Israel smote and possessed their lands.

The Peace Plan.—Note that the tribes were not left to select their own lands, as it might happen, where they should settle, but everything was care-

fully planned out. The great ability of Joshua never shone out more clearly than it does here. In chapters 13 to 22 we have the assignment of lands to the twelve tribes. Nine and a half tribes have their apportionment on the west side of Jordan and two and a half tribes on the east side. The Tabernacle of God is set up at Shiloh—chapter 18:1. The rest of the eighteenth chapter up to and including the twenty-second, has to do with further tribal apportionment and the appointing of six cities of refuge and forty-eight cities given to the Levites. Everything is done in an orderly and systematic way.

The Real Significance of Joshua's Work was that he worked under the direction of God—this is always made prominent. First, for the purification of the land from the awful parody of its religion in the exaltation of immorality. Second, the exaltation of the worship of the one true God. Third, the beginning of civil and religious liberty.

Joshua's Farewell Address.—Nothing could be finer. Read chapters 23 and 24. Near the close of his life he calls the tribes together and gives them his parting words. He reviews his twenty-five years with them as their leader. He recalls to their minds what has been accomplished. He reminds them of God's great goodness and care and of how much He has done for them. He earnestly warns against lapses into idolatry. He charges them to be faithful to their God. He renews the covenant with God.

Characteristics of Joshua.—First—perfect faith in God. Second—masterly courage. Third—greatness of leadership both in war and in peace. Fourth

—lasting enthusiasm. Fifth—unswerving fidelity in the discharge of all his duties.

Questions.—Why was a new leader wanted? What can be said about the choice of Joshua? What was his personal equipment? What can be said of the situation, as Joshua saw it, with which he had to deal? What was the work to be done? What was the war plan? What the peace plan? What was the real significance of Joshua's work? Give the points in Joshua's farewell address. What were the five characteristics of Joshua?

VII

SAUL

THE MAN WHO ABUSED HIS OPPORTUNITIES

The Opportunities of Saul (1 Samuel 8:19 to 31:13).—No man ever had so many chances to make a success of life thrust upon him and no man ever so missed them. No, not missed them; let us rather say that he went out of his way to abuse them. How did he do it? His sun rose, in splendour, with every prospect of a glorious day. It set in darkness with a tempest raging. Such a career is well worth the closest study in order that we may realize the dangers to be avoided. It is not the opportunities, big or little, that count; it is the use that is made of them.

The Backward Look to the transition period, between Joshua, who succeeded Moses and conquered Canaan, and Saul, the first king of Israel, is well worth while. The story is told, from the first chapter of Judges, up to and including the eighth chapter of 1 Samuel. It is a stirring history, of hundreds of years, compressed in thirty-three short Bible chapters.

The key-note is found in Judges 2:16-19. Things do not run smoothly. Israel falls into sin; becomes a prey to her enemies; repents and calls on God; God hears and raises up a leader ("Judge,"

so called) who delivers the nation; then the nation falls into sin again and the round is repeated about thirteen times. No great man arises like Moses or Joshua. This period is very much like the "Middle Ages of Europe." While the ark seems to remain at Shiloh there is no central national government, no political unity, and the supremacy passes from tribe to tribe. The original inhabitants of the land are hostile and bitter.

The problem of the Israelites was to retain their faith in God and to keep hold of the land. The temptation was constant to relapse into the heathenish ways of the Canaanites. The beautiful story of the book of Ruth shows, however, that there were some very good people even in these dark days.

The Forward Look.—When things are very bad in a people's affairs one of two things happens: First—the end is the extinction of that race or, Second—a party arises which demands a radical change for the better. It is to the credit of the Israelites that a radical change for the better was demanded. With Samuel, the last of the judges and the first of the prophets, it was thought that a new era had dawned. He, at first, did great things in bringing order out of chaos and in the heading of a new and better administration of affairs. But he was growing old. He made his sons judges. This was the finishing touch for they were bad through and through. They took bribes and sold judgments—1 Samuel 8:1-22. Then the chief men came to Samuel and demanded a new administration. They could see no better way than to have a new move. Samuel's sons were im-

possible. They asked for a king like the nations round about them. Samuel tried to dissuade them but they would not listen to him. Samuel took the matter to the Lord and he was told to yield to the people's demand.

In this Backward and Forward Look we see the straits to which the people were put and the reason for the desire for a strong hand to guide and control affairs. But in this demand the people set aside God's immediate government and Samuel. Yet this seemed, at this time, with Samuel's evil sons coming into power, the thing to do—the appointment of a king.

The Splendid Advent of Saul, the first king of Israel. No reign of any king was ever begun under fairer prospects—1 Samuel 8:18-22. He was chosen by Samuel under the direct command of God. The people were for him to a man—and not simply the leaders. When Samuel presented him to the people there was great rejoicing. "And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king"—1 Samuel 10:24.

Personally, he was good to look upon. He was taller, by a head, than most men—1 Samuel 9:1, 2. He was modest—9:21—in that when it was shown him that he was to be king he declared he was not worthy. When he was to be publicly chosen he hid himself and was not found—10:20, 23. For the story read 9:1 to 10:26.

The Pinnacle of Success.—Without any effort,

on his part, Saul was elevated to the headship of a people destined to outlast all the nations of antiquity. He seems, at first, to have taken his new duties and responsibilities with great seriousness and earnestness. From all that we can gather he soon made the name of Israel, by his wise administration, feared and respected. He had statesman-like qualities and was an eminent military leader. He conducted three brilliant military campaigns against the enemies of Israel. First—against the Amorites, on the east side of Jordan—chapter 11. Second—against the Philistines, on the west—14:1-31. Third—against the Amalekites, on the south—15:1-7. On every side he fought against and vexed the enemies of Israel—14:47.

The Decline and Downfall of Saul.—Everything seemed to point to a long and successful reign; a renewal of the glory that was Israel's during the leadership of Joshua and an advance to even greater things. We look—and everything is going up. We look again—and everything is on the down-grade. "It is the old familiar story of pride, egotism and the abuse of power leading to moral degradation and ruin." Let us consider the points on the downward road traveled by Saul.

First—he forgot that he had been chosen to do a certain piece of good work in helping Israel up out of a hard situation. The people had asked for him; the Lord had acceded to their request—8:4-22. Again and again he makes it manifest that he proposes to forget both his God and his people and to reign as it seems best to himself—willfully and self-

ishly—15:19-22. The story of how this man ruined himself and came near wrecking his country is told in seventeen chapters of 1 Samuel, 15 to 31.

Second—he allowed envy and jealousy to get the better of him and stifled every generous and noble impulse. Take the case of David who slew the giant Goliath—chapter 17—Saul, instead of rejoicing over this fact, is envious of David and tries to kill him—18:6-11. He orders him killed—19:1.

Third—he lost all sense of loyalty and sought to deal treacherously with David. He laid a trap for him whereby he hoped that he would be killed, indeed expected he would be, in exacting as a dowry for his daughter's hand a hundred enemies slain—18:20-30.

Fourth—from the nineteenth to the thirtieth chapters, inclusive, we have the account of how Saul lays aside all idea of reigning except by his own erratic will. He has forsaken God and while he seeks to get into touch with Him now and then it is only that he may foster some selfish scheme of his not with any thought of serving or obeying Him. He hunts David as a wild beast is hunted.

Fifth—he becomes the subject of attacks of deep melancholy. In one of his fits of depression he visits the Witch of Endor. It is here shown to what depths this once noble man has fallen.

The Tragic Death (Ch. 31).—A life so misspent can have but one ending and it must be tragic. But long before the physical death there was the going out of the man all that was noble and good. Before Saul took his own physical life he had already taken

his moral life. The case of Saul is not isolated—it is occurring, here and there, every day.

Questions.—What can be said of the opportunities of Saul? The backward; the forward look? Give an account of the splendid advent of Saul. What can be said of the pinnacle of his success? Give the five points in his decline and fall. What can be said of his tragic death?

VIII

DAVID

THE SELF-CONQUEROR WHO BECAME KING

David, the Second King of Israel, at once succeeded Saul. There is no interval of time. At first he was king of Judah for about seven years. Then for the remainder of the forty years of his reign he was king of the united kingdom of Judah and Israel. The complete story is told from 1 Samuel 16:1, through 2 Samuel, to 1 Kings 2:11. It has been said of him—"In his own person he represents the athlete, the shepherd, the poet, the musician, the mystic, the man of war, the father, the friend and the statesman."

The Self-Conqueror.—Saul had the high office of "King of All Israel" handed to him, so to speak, on a silver platter. He served no apprenticeship. He underwent no hardships. David, "The Self-Conqueror," on the other hand had some very bitter and trying experiences before he attained his high place. Self-Control is one of David's chief characteristics. This is one of the greatest virtues that any man can have and exercise. It is a blessing to the man who has it and to those with whom he comes in contact. Without it a man is a menace to society. Many an able man, splendidly equipped in all other

respects, has made a disastrous failure of his life and mission because he lacked this virtue.

It is interesting to read the story of David's life and exploits, with this matter of "Self-Control" in mind, and to mark how he exercised it in face of envy, hatred, revenge, degradation from high to low places and how he stood the hard tests, in all but one instance and of that he repented bitterly. He passed through a number of hard schools. Let us consider them:

The School of the Open Fields (1 Samuel 16:11-13 and 16-23; 17:34-37).—David was a keeper of sheep, as a young man. It was a good easy place. The tendency, in such a place, is to let down and let things drift. Notice that David did nothing of the sort. He overcame the tendency to laziness. He became such a skillful musician that his fame reached even to the king and he was called to play on a harp at court. On the opposite side he became a skilled marksman, with the sling, and an athlete—so that it was an easy thing for him to throw a stone, just one, with such accuracy that it found its mark on the face of the giant Goliath and then when he was stunned he jumped in and finished the job—1 Samuel, chapter 17. How did he do this so easily and without fear? Why? He had been educated in "the School of the Lion and the Bear"—1 Samuel 17:34-37. He had confidence because he had exercised self-control over the natural tendency to let down. He kept himself fit.

The School of the Court (1 Samuel 18:2 to 21:9).—The call to go to this school came from

king Saul—18:2. His introduction is pleasant for here begins that friendship with Jonathan, the son of Saul, which is one of the brightest spots in the life of David. But this is a much harder school than the first because that here David must exercise self-control before the undeserved and uncalled-for envy of his king. After David slew Goliath instead of its bringing him praise from Saul it brought only hatred and a desire to kill.

Consider the position of David, high-minded, enthusiastic, rejoicing in the fact that he has done a great service and saved the nation from disastrous defeat, when he has a javelin thrown at him with the intent to pin him to the wall. What a tumult there must have been in his feeling! He cannot realize, at first, that he is not wanted and the quicker he takes himself out of the way the better it will be for him.

This is the "School of the Court"—to do some service, it may be a great one, and then find it not only unappreciated but that it brings enmity and hatred. That David refused to hate and envy in return, although he was hunted like a wild beast, shows his marvelous self-control and his trust in his God—that He would care for him.

The School of the Outlaw Camp (1 Samuel 21:10 to 31:13).—Nearly eleven chapters are given to what David learned here. He was now definitely out of court life. There was no possible return. He was an outlaw. The royal command had been given to kill David—1 Samuel 19:1—but at first he did not realize that it was really meant. When he did

realize it—1 Samuel 21:10-15—he knew what fear could do to him. He had not feared the lion or the bear or a giant or the Philistines but this fear was different. It took hold upon his heart strings. It paralyzed his mind. He fled for fear of Saul. He had never feared man before. He had never feared an enemy before and yet he feigned madness in the presence of the king of Gath. Many a man, under such an experience, would let bitterness enter into his soul and he would determine, within himself, that when his opportunity came, his hand would take the sword and be revenged. But not so David, even when he was compelled to associate with outlaws—1 Samuel 22:1, 2. He shows a self-control here that is marvelous. During this period of his life, when he could have taken the life of Saul a number of times, he spares him.

King Without a Kingdom.—While David was still in “the School of the Open Fields” he was anointed king of Israel by Samuel—16:1-13. Saul was still living and reigning. There was no telling how long he would live and reign. David was king without a kingdom. David must have wondered what it all meant when he was passing through his hard experiences. Was he really the king? The thought must have come to him, “If Saul is hunting me, why not hunt him? Why not kill him and seize the kingdom? I can do it. If it is to be a fight—let me fight as well as Saul.” This is the human of it. When many a man comes into a similar situation—he grasps what he can. Again there comes in the factor of David’s life where he

trusted in his God—that He would care for him and straighten things out—and that in the meantime he must control himself. He must conquer his natural desire to take things into his own hands and compel them to do his will against the Divine Will.

King of Half a Kingdom (2 Samuel 2:4 to 5:3).—When Saul and Jonathan were dead—1 Samuel Ch. 31 to 2 Samuel 1:1–16—David showed his fine spirit in the beautiful psalm that he composed in their honour (read 2 Samuel 1:17–27). He might have thought that he would immediately come into the kingship that had been promised him, when he was anointed, but here again a disappointment awaits him. He was now to take about a seven years' course in "the School of Delayed Fulfillment of Promises." It is not easy to wait for something that is your due and which has been promised you long before.

There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David; but David waxed stronger and stronger and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker"—2 Samuel 3:1. Israel's rejection of David may have been due to the fact that the leaders of Israel did not want David, who had been proclaimed an outlaw, to rule over them. Here again David seems to have exercised his wonderful self-control in not pressing matters unduly. The headquarters of David was at Hebron.

King of all Israel (2 Samuel 5:3 to 1 Kings 2:10).—David's patience and self-control were at last rewarded. He was approached by the elders of

Israel and asked to be their king as well as king of Judah—2 Samuel 5:1-3. Samuel had anointed him to be “King of all Israel”—1 Samuel 16:1-13—and he was now king.

The Home Political Policy of David was centralization of power. He at once besieged Jerusalem, took it and made it his capital. This was where he dwelt and it was to the head offices in this city that all tribal business must come—2 Samuel 5.

The Religious Policy of David was also centralization of worship. As speedily as possible he brought the ark to Jerusalem where all must come, in due time, for the performance of their religious duties—2 Samuel 6. He wanted to build at once a suitable temple of worship but he was bidden to defer it—2 Samuel 7.

The Foreign Policy of David was strong. He was vigorous in pushing his conquests over the enemies of Israel. The Ammonites, the Moabites, the Edomites, the Scythians, and the Amalekites were made vassals and the borders of the kingdom extended from the Mediterranean to the River Euphrates.

A Great Kingdom was built up from the nucleus of a weak tribal life and a royal line was established which was to end in Christ who is “King over All.”

David's Army, upon which he could draw, would not be considered small even in modern times (1,300,000 “men that drew the sword”—2 Samuel 24:9) yet his whole effort was for peace and the religious building up of his empire.

The One Blot on David's Life is his treatment of

Bathsheba and Uriah. And this sin is not glossed over, as it might have been, in the account of his career—2 Samuel 11. He bitterly suffered for this sin in the conduct of his family, and the multiplied troubles that came upon him. He lost self-control and went down into the depths. It is difficult to understand how a man like David could so forget himself after standing up under so many greater trials.

It is to David's Great Credit that when the Lord sent Nathan, the prophet, to bring to his attention his sin he at once acknowledged it and repented—2 Samuel 12.

Characteristics.—David is many men in one. He is unsurpassed as poet. His short poems—psalms—have outlasted all others and are to-day as fresh as when they were written. For loftiness of thought and beauty of diction they stand alone. They charm and they console. In connection with this lesson David's "Psalm of Thanksgiving," for deliverance from his enemies, should be read aloud before the class—2 Samuel, chapter 22. As a man of war he knew how far to go in pressing his victories. As a statesman, in building up a great empire, he is a model. As a friend—witness the friendship between him and Jonathan—he is ideal. As a man, he is a man amongst men, he had rare virtues. As a follower of God he knew how to obey Him and worship Him as few men do.

Questions.—What can be said about David; how long is the interval between him and Saul? What about the length of his reign? How did the

circumstances differ between him and Saul coming to the kingdom? What about Self-Control? What can be said about "the School of the Open Fields" and David? What about "the School of the Court"? What about "the School of the Outlaw Camp"? Give some account of David as "King Without a Kingdom." "King of Half a Kingdom." "King of All Israel." What are the characteristics of David?

IX

NEHEMIAH

THE MAN WITH MANY ENEMIES

Foreword.—We consider, here, the story of Nehemiah in the first seven chapters of the book which bears his name. Where and how did this man come to make so many bitter enemies who opposed and tried to stop his work? What means did he take to get the better of them? How did he succeed?

Before we answer these questions we must first see where he fits into the Bible plan, and the importance of the place he had in it.

Between King David, in our last study, and Nehemiah came King Solomon, David's son, who built a great temple for the worship of God and made Jerusalem one of the great cities of the ancient world. In the latter part of his reign he fell away from the worship of God and his kingdom declined. After his death the kingdom split into two parts—"The Northern" and "The Southern." The first had nineteen kings and nine dynasties. The second, with its seat in Jerusalem, had twenty kings and one dynasty. In spite of repeated prophetic warnings the people fell away from the worship of God.

The Northern Kingdom was carried into captivity by the Assyrians in 722 B. C. and the Southern Kingdom, by the Babylonians in 586 B. C. The mag-

nificent temple of Solomon was destroyed, the palaces burned, and the walls of Jerusalem were broken down. In due time the Babylonians were conquered by the Persians. When this happened, as it had been foretold by the prophets the "Chosen People" were given permission to return home. This story is told in the book of Ezra. This happened in 536 B. C. Zerubbabel led a large colony back to Jerusalem. Houses were built and also a temple but the walls of the city were not built up. A second colony was led by Ezra about sixty years later.

The City Walls in Ruins.—Thirteen years after Ezra's second colony came to Jerusalem or seventy-three years after permission had been given the "Chosen People" to return from captivity and rebuild Jerusalem the walls of the city were still in ruins. Not because the people did not desire to rebuild them but because of the bitter opposition of the surrounding small nations. In consequence the city was frequently raided and there was little assured safety of one's person or goods. A city, in constant anxiety and terror, has a small chance of growth. This was as the surrounding peoples intended it should be. But where were all the promises given the "Chosen People"? Why were they not fulfilled?

A Rebuilding Expedition Organized.—The wretched condition of Jerusalem is brought to the attention of Nehemiah—1:1-3—by some men who had just returned to Susa, the capital of Persia. He is told of the great affliction of the inhabitants, of the city wall, that is broken down, and of the gates

burned with fire. Nehemiah, who holds a high office under Artaxerxes, the king, is shocked by what he hears. So much so that he weeps and mourns over the news and fasts certain days. It seems to him that he can do little but he goes to God in most earnest prayer—1:5-11. A while after this, being before the king, the king notices his anxiety, in his sadness of countenance and inquires the cause. Nehemiah tells him, and after telling him, he makes request that he be allowed to head "An Expedition to Rebuild the Walls of Jerusalem." The character of Nehemiah shines forth, in this request, that he may help his afflicted people. He was at ease, in a good place, why should he concern himself about the misfortunes of others? He not only thought of his people in sore trouble, wept over them, enlisted the help of others, but he took the leading part in a difficult and dangerous undertaking—2:1-8.

✱ King Artaxerxes gave Nehemiah all due authority to do that which he asks of him.

Nehemiah's Midnight Ride (2:9-17).—Nehemiah led no colony of people as Ezra had done. He came alone to Jerusalem—save that he had a military escort. Arrived in the city he presented his letters of the king's authority. He was in the city three days and listened attentively to all that was told him about the condition of affairs. Then he determined to see for himself just what needed to be done. Telling no one of his intentions, one night he took a few men and went out to see, for himself, just what state the walls were in. He rode on his horse as far as he could and then, when the way became impassable

for the horse, he got off and made the rest of the way on foot. He realized the necessity of having exact, first hand knowledge of the difficulties of the work he had come to do.

Rebuilding Begins.—It is carried forward to completion. That which two large colonies of the "Chosen People" were unable to accomplish in seventy-three years this man Nehemiah brought to pass in fifty-one days. He had a distinct plan, in his mind, of what he wanted to do. There was no doubt about it. He presented that plan and urged its adoption. He organized the people into groups and gave to each group—2:17-3:32—a definite portion of the wall to build and held each group responsible for its work. No one can read the third chapter without being convinced of the masterly qualities of the mind of Nehemiah. We have here one of the really great men at work. His methods are the only methods which will bring results that are worth while to-day.

Opposition Tactics of Nehemiah's Enemies.—It is not to be supposed that those who opposed the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem for seventy-three years would remain inactive when they saw what was going on under the direction of Nehemiah. They were decidedly not inactive. They left no stone unturned to check the rebuilding of the wall. They used fair means and foul. It is in checkmating the efforts to stop this important work and keeping it going, at high speed, that the genius and greatness of Nehemiah shines forth.

Let us look at some of the hostile methods em-

ployed. They are still in use. The way Nehemiah dealt with them is still the best way. In this there has been no advance. Here this study is very, very practical.

First method—Ridicule—2:19 and 4:2. The enemies made fun of that which was being done. They said—"What do these feeble Jews?" Let them go on—the work will amount to nothing. Even if they do build, what they build will amount to nothing. A fox could break it down. People do not like to be ridiculed. Many a person has been laughed out of their religion and from goodness into evil. Nehemiah prayed over the matter and asked God to turn their reproach on their own head—4:4-6. Notice this that he kept right on, ignoring the ridicule, with the work.

Second method—Fear—4:7-23. The enemies sent word that unless the work was stopped they would have a fight on their hands. This was an ultimatum. It is always the policy of evil to intimidate wherever it can. It is always threatening and blustering of what it will do if its plans are interfered with. Nehemiah told the people to go on with the work. He set a watch. He organized companies to do any fighting that was necessary. He did not propose to be intimidated. No fight came. When evil finds it cannot make a man, engaged in a good work, afraid it lets up on its opposition.

Third method—Guile—6:2-4. It is that of a conference. Nehemiah's enemies said to him—"Come let us talk this matter over." There can be no harm in that to you. Nehemiah replied that

there was nothing to talk over. That he was doing a great work and could not spend the time. Many a man gets entangled in evil alliances when he stops to hold conferences with those whose only purpose is to promote wrong things. There are some things that ought never to be discussed.

Fourth method—False accusation—6:5-9. Nehemiah was charged with doing what he did not for the benefit of the inhabitants of Jerusalem but for himself that he might cause the people to rebel and that he might be king. Word is sent back that that charge is a trumped up one and that there is no truth in it. It is simply and solely made to hinder the work. No good and disinterested work was ever done, by any one, but that this accusation was sure to be made—that there was a selfish motive behind it. The only way to treat this is by denial and going on with the work.

*Fifth method—Temptation to tempt God—6:10-14—*by shutting himself—Nehemiah—up in the temple and hiding there as if he had done something wrong. He refused to do it.

*Sixth—Corruption of one's friends and associates—6:17-19—*by the relation of evil and false stories. This is about the meanest thing an enemy can do. Nehemiah makes no reply save that it was done for the purpose of raising fear.

How Nehemiah Bested His Enemies.—A man's real ability comes to the front when he has to cope with seemingly insurmountable obstacles and to devise ways and means to overcome them. A man's real character comes to the front when he stands

1 true to his principles in the midst of strong temptations and bitter opposition. Nehemiah stands these acid tests. There are certain things which stand out in this book of great deeds of the one who came, single handed, to do a great work in Jerusalem.

[First—He was a man of prayer.] He goes again and yet again to God to help him solve his problems. Read the master prayer—1: 5-11.

Second—He was single hearted in his devotion to his God, his fellow men and his work.

Third—He took no chances of being defeated in carrying out his plans. He took every proper precaution against surprise attacks.

[Fourth—He encouraged those with whom he worked and put heart into them.]

Questions.—What is said in “The Foreword” of the intervening history between David and Nehemiah? What is said of the city walls of Jerusalem? What is said of the expedition to rebuild the walls? Give an account of the midnight ride of Nehemiah. What can be said of the rebuilding plan? Give an account of the six methods, under “Opposition Tactics,” used by Nehemiah’s enemies to hinder and prevent his work. How did Nehemiah get the better of his enemies—the four points?

X

JOB

THE MAN OF UNDESERVED SUFFERING

Job is a Prosperous Man of Large Affairs who comes suddenly face to face with the problem of undeserved suffering. The whole matter is set forth in the book of Job. It has no connection with Mosaic Law or Israelitish History and makes no allusion to them.

Disaster After Disaster Falls Upon Job.—"Four servants come running in turn to Job bringing him news of calamities: the first spoke of robbers who had destroyed property and servants; the second of lightning destroying sheep and shepherds; the third of three bands of marauders who stole all the camels and killed their drivers; the fourth of a cyclone which destroyed the manor house and killed his seven sons." After a little time has passed he is made to suffer by the affliction of sore boils—1:1-22 to 2:8. He does not know why.

The Problem of Human Suffering is one of the big mysteries of life. Many attempts have been made to solve it. Religion and philosophy have had endless discussions over it and are still at them. There is no diminution of interest because it is a problem of universal personal concern. The experiences of Job, in a large or small way, are the experiences of every one.

Deserved suffering we can understand. When a man has endeavored to put through an evil thing, and is caught and punished, we say that that man got just what he deserved.

Undeserved suffering baffles 'us. We see losses of property, disasters of all sorts, and sickness befalling those so far as we know, and so far as they can see themselves, are undeserved. Once in a while we get a glimpse of "The Why" of things but not often. But it should be said that that glimpse is often very illuminating. Hence our great interest in Job and the disasters which befell him. We see here a gleam of light.

Events Hidden from Job.—In the opening chapter we are shown the cause of the beginning of Job's troubles. We see what is going on behind the scenes. A test is proposed of this man's integrity and faith. If he had been informed, in advance, he would have prepared himself but then there would have been no adequate test. This testing and trying out of men, for their fitness and adaptability for higher positions in the business and professional world, is what is going on every day. Some men in this way are put through grilling experiences—not for the purpose of inflicting undeserved suffering, far from it, but to ascertain whether the man has his heart in the work or does it because of the stipend or reward he gets from it. The direct charge made by Satan was that Job served God, not because he loved Him but from what he got out of it. He asks—"Doth Job fear God for naught?" Satan declares that God has put a hedge about Job that makes it to Job's personal

interest to serve Him. But take away that hedge and "he will curse thee to thy face." Job is then given over for the testing in the loss of his property and severe bodily affliction.

Events Known to Job.—He knows nothing of what is going on behind the scenes; he only knows that he is being hit and hit hard. He is totally at a loss to know why the blows come and who is giving them. He loses his property. His children are killed. He is afflicted with "sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown." Three candid friends accuse him of sins of which he is not guilty and which he abhors. It has been remarked that probably Job could have withstood his other trials more easily if it had not been for his candid friends who tried to show him the error of his ways. From the replies of Job to his friends' accusations of a concealed evil life which causes his troubles—now out in the open—Job can make no adequate reply save that he is not guilty in thought or action. He calls upon God to witness his innocence. He wishes he might find Him to present his cause before Him.

The Point of the Book, or the Pivot on which it Turns is not so much the solution of the problem of undeserved suffering (for after all the discussions up and down and all around—we do not find much advancement in it) as the question of whether Job stands fast in his principles and his faith in God?

The first test that Job will denounce his God, when he loses his property, is successfully passed. He does not lose his faith.

The second test that Job will denounce his God,

when his body is sore afflicted, is successfully passed. He is proved to be a man who is single-hearted, irrespective of what he gets for it, in his service of God.

It should be noted that Satan proposes no third test. He has no hold upon a man who withstands his first two tests. These tests were not something peculiar to Job; they are being applied, in one way and another, to every man and every woman, to every boy and girl, every day. If successfully passed—there is a “Going Up” in the grade of moral character—if not—there is a “Going Down” in grade of moral character.

The Three Candid Friends—Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar—of Job appear early upon the scene and remain until the end—Job 2:11 to 42:17. Every possible phase of human suffering, and its application to human life, is discussed. There is here brought forth all that the human mind can suggest on the subject of retributive justice apart from revelation. There are three cycles in the discussion, in which each friend speaks and Job answers, except in the last when Zophar remains silent. This discussion is not only interesting but necessary in the showing of the supreme value of the position of Job.

Before we consider this discussion further let us take a look at Job's “Three Candid Friends.” They had evidently met by appointment, had talked over his case, and determined to go and labour with him on the error of his ways. They knew what they were going to say and how they were going to say it. Job doubtless said, before they got through with him, as many a man has said before and since—“Good Lord,

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deliver me from candid friends" who delight to tell me my faults while I hesitate to tell them theirs." But when they saw Job—this former, big, hearty, upstanding man—so worn and thin and sick by reason of his boils they were struck dumb. They said nothing, at all, to him for seven days and seven nights. Then they girded themselves for their self-appointed task of bringing Job to a knowledge of his faults.

The discussion is in three cycles—First—chapters 4 to 14. The purpose is to show that sin is the cause of suffering. If a man is sorely afflicted he must have been a great sinner. Second—Ch. 15 to 21. An advanced position is taken. Job is held to be actually guilty of some great sin which has produced his suffering. Third—22 to 31. Job's friends are shown at their worst. The attempt is made to show that the punishments with which Job is afflicted are the very ones which would be meted out to a man who had yielded to the temptations of a man in his position. They insist that Job has committed great sins.

Job insists that he is innocent and stands fast in his integrity. He asserts that man knows little of the unsearchable wisdom of his Creator.

The Speech of Elihu (Ch. 32 to 37).—A young man. A relative of Job. He asserts that Job has maintained his righteousness. He has a new theory to advance in regard to unmerited suffering and that is that, by it, God is instructing men in righteousness and saving them from the commission of sin. Job makes no answer.

The Divine Intervention (38 to 41).—First—God is represented as speaking out of a whirlwind and to call attention to the fact that man ought to know, at least, why such strange instincts are given even to animals before he attempts to argue with their Maker. Second—God is represented as saying that before man brings a charge of injustice against Him he should be able to rule the universe and reduce all things to order. If man is baffled by the simplest problems how can he contend with God?

The Restoration of Job (Ch. 42).—He and his friends bow themselves before the wisdom, power, justice and glory of God.

Job has been tested by the most severe trials and stands fast in his integrity. It is shown that a man can and will serve God under what seem to be impossible and grueling conditions and circumstances.

Questions.—What can be said of Job, the prosperous man? What about the disasters that fall upon Job? What is the problem of human suffering; deserved and undeserved? What can be said of the events hidden from Job? Of the events known to Job? What is the point of the book of Job? What can be said of the three "Candid Friends" of Job? Give their three arguments. How does Job answer? What can be said of the speech of Elihu, the Divine Intervention and Job's restoration?

XI

ISAIAH

THE WORLD PROPHET AND STATESMAN

The Man—Isaiah.—He lived in the lower part of the city of Jerusalem. His father's name was Amoz. He had a wife and two sons. He was very active, as a citizen, in all municipal affairs. He took a large interest in national and international politics. In all things that concerned the people, for their good, he could be counted on to take a leading part. He stood out in the open. Every one knew Isaiah.

The Prophet—Isaiah.—He has been called "The Greatest of All the Prophets." We take here the account of his work found in the first thirty-nine chapters of the book which bears his name. The office of prophet was an ancient one. Samuel is looked upon as the founder, but the matter probably goes back beyond him. The Bible represents the prophet as one who speaks for another. He was supposed to communicate the message of God to His people. Read chapters one and six and see how eminently true this was of Isaiah. He says—"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken"—1:2. He believed that he was called of God to do his work—ch. 6.

He taught—First, the greatness, unity, holiness, spirituality, goodness and justice of God; Sec-

ond, Love of country. He was an ardent patriot. For the religion of Jehovah must have a suitable place for its development and that place was "The Chosen Nation"; Third, The whole earth belonged to God and hence all nations came within the province of God's prophet. He had messages for Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, Syria, Moab, Edom, etc. See chs. 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, etc.; Fourth, The coming of a universal king and kingdom—chs. 2, 9, 11, etc.; Fifth, He called not only his own but all nations to repentance and faith in God. Many of his predictions in regard to the ancient nations have been fulfilled. What he taught is as pertinent to-day as it was when he was on earth; there is a freshness and beauty here that is unsurpassed.

The Scene of His Labours—Jerusalem.—It was no mean city. It was midway between the great capitals of Assyria and Egypt. It was strongly fortified with huge walls. It was outwardly splendid in all its appointments. Here were the great palaces of the king, his nobles and the merchant princes. King Solomon's Temple, probably the most magnificent religious structure ever erected, was still standing. Its business ventures reached to the ends of the earth.

The Spirit of the Times was commercial; much, very much, like our own. It is remarkable how close the resemblance is. "The Chosen People" had passed through two stages of development—First, The nomadic, the desert wandering; Second, The agricultural, dwelling on and cultivating the land which they had conquered in Canaan. Now there had come a third state in which the Jewish nation had

become traders having large dealings with the surrounding nations; fitting out caravans and ships and sending and receiving embassies. The head offices were all in Jerusalem. Here was no longer "A Shut in Nation." The growth of the commercial spirit is very marked from the times of King Solomon on through the divided kingdom.

We have now to deal with the city and city life developed at the expense of the country, social wants and sins, the evils of great wealth quickly won, dire poverty—the dark shadow flung by immense wealth—and ostentatious luxury. Foreign vices were brought in with foreign goods. The times changed and the people with them. "The Chosen Nation" sought not to be conformed to the religion of Jehovah and His laws but to be like the great and evil nations with which they were surrounded.

It is quite necessary to keep in mind this background in order to understand what Isaiah tried to do. He knows just what will happen—and it happened—if the people do not take heed to their ways. He raises a warning voice. He pleads. He entreats. He urges the people to return to God and to obey Him before it is too late. He is no sour and dour prophet but he paints glowing pictures of the people's future if they will turn to God. These pictures become reality when they do turn to God; but unfortunately the return is short lived.

The Political Situation.—From recent discoveries in ancient Bible lands we are just beginning to realize the great issues with which Isaiah was dealing. Judah, a comparatively small kingdom,

after Israel was conquered and taken into captivity in 722, was not easy to keep as an independent kingdom between the two huge empires,—dividing between them the sovereignty of the then known world. The two empires—Assyria on the north and Egypt on the south—were always threatening to gather in this buffer state of Judah. Each hesitated to take it but intrigued to get it to declare itself.

Let us take one thing that happened which will show what a big task Isaiah had. He prophesied under the kings of Judah—740 to 701 B. C.—Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. Isaiah managed to keep Uzziah and Jotham from burning their fingers with Assyria and Egypt. Ahaz, however, would have none of Isaiah's advice. He repudiated the worship of Jehovah, closed the temple. He urged the worship of Baal and offered human sacrifices. A quarrel was picked with Israel and Syria and when Ahaz found that he would be defeated he called upon Assyria to help him. That was just what Assyria had been hoping he would do. The result was, in the end a while afterwards, the captivity of Israel and the near wiping out of Judah.

Isaiah advocated the policy of letting the big evil nations alone, entirely alone. Let them fight their own battles. The little nation that got mixed up with them was sure to get the worst of it. Then their religion was totally and utterly opposite to that of "The Chosen People." It allowed and advocated immoralities which would, in time, wreck the nation—which all came true.

Warnings Against Entangling Alliances.—Isaiah

continued to urge, in the strongest language possible, that Judah stand out against political and religious alliances with nations whose purposes and ideals differed fundamentally with those of "The Chosen People." No matter how attractive they might seem to be; yet, in the end, they would be disastrous. This is still good advice not only for nations but individuals.

Take the story of King Hezekiah—told in the thirty-sixth and thirty-seventh chapters. Sennacherib, king of Assyria, when he found he could not gain, by diplomacy, the little kingdom of Judah, came with a huge army and besieged Jerusalem. He demanded its surrender or sack and pillage. Hezekiah went to Isaiah and Isaiah adhered to his policy of making no entangling alliance with Assyria. The result was that Sennacherib retired and the little kingdom of Judah remained independent through its trust in its God.

The urge of Isaiah—against entangling alliances and covenants between nations whose sole reliance is on force, as in the case of Assyria, and others who seek to advance by the methods of peace and service—is still the only policy which will win out. Every individual, to really amount to anything, must stand fast, in his integrity, no matter what happens.

Isaiah's Work for His Own People.—He was an ardent patriot. He realized that "The Religion of Jehovah" must have a suitable environment, in which to live and work. No matter how strongly a nation or man may be grounded in right principles they are

hindered or helped by wrong or right surroundings. Isaiah understood this thing very thoroughly and hence he was strong in his advocacy of that which bettered his city and his nation. If there had been popular elections in those days he would have been found advocating, openly and enthusiastically, the right things in the campaign, voting himself and urging others to vote.

World Prophet and Statesman.—No one realized more than Isaiah that not only must good work be done at home but that missionary work must be done abroad. That the field was the world and it was the business of every one having the good of his own people at heart also to have the good of the world at heart. Hence his prophecies cover the nations of the whole earth. This does not contradict Isaiah's position in regard to keeping out of entangling alliances with evil. There is no hope that way of bettering anybody or anything.

Modern Uses of Isaiah's Prophecies.—First—To strengthen our faith in the certainty of God's reign and rule upon this earth. We go and read the resurrected monuments of Assyria and Egypt and see that all that Isaiah said of their might is true. We see also that all he said of their total ruin and destruction has come true. It was a most incredulous thing—when the prophecies were uttered—that they would ever be fulfilled. Again that which he said about the coming of The Messiah was begun, hundreds of years, afterwards and is even now going on unto fulfillment. Second—To give us far-sightedness. That we may see and believe that however evil

may seem to triumph that, in the end, it is sure to be defeated. Third—to help us to believe that everything we do to help advance the Kingdom of God will surely have its reward.

Questions.—What can be said of Isaiah as a man? As a prophet? Where was the scene of his labours? What was the spirit of the times? What was the political situation? What were the warnings against entangling alliances? What was Isaiah's work for his own people? What can be said of Isaiah as a world prophet and statesman? Give the three modern uses of Isaiah's prophecies.

XII

JEREMIAH

THE MAN WHO KEPT FAITH UNDER HARD LIMITATIONS

Jeremiah, the Prophet, is burdened with oppressive restraints. Serving God, with all his heart, and obeying Him, in all things, he never gets out from under his restrictions. He never has a respite. Things, with him, grow worse—never better. Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Nehemiah, all had a great deal of trouble but they overcame it. Even Job, after going down, away down, into the valley of humiliation, came again to the upland of joy and prosperity, but not so this prophet.

The Question Presented is—How could Jeremiah keep his faith and do his “God-Appointed Work” in the midst of such depressing circumstances? This is a very practical modern question. Why? Because men, to-day, not infrequently get into difficulties, through no fault of their own. They can see no hope of extricating themselves. Friends, relatives, and associates seem utterly indifferent to their plight. Again men and women, stirred by the evils they see about them, and the havoc they are making in tearing down all good things, start campaigns of reform only to be laughed at and ridiculed as Jeremiah was.

The Book of Jeremiah, where the life, call, and

work of the prophet are set forth, consists of fifty-two chapters of condensed material. It is a combination of prophecy, history and biography.

It may be divided into nine sections—First, Ch. 1, The prophet's call. His mission is not only to his own but all nations; Second, chs. 2-6, The sins of Judah set forth; Third, chs. 7-10, The call to repentance. Calamities are sure to come unless the warning is heeded; Fourth, chs. 11-13, An appeal is made to the covenant between God and His people; Fifth, chs. 14-22, The failure of the people to heed the prophet. Disaster and captivity foretold; Sixth, chs. 23-29, Jeremiah sees no hope of betterment in his time for this "Chosen People" and he looks ahead for seventy years and sees a return from captivity; Seventh, chs. 30-33, Consolations that will come after seventy years of captivity; Eighth, chs. 34-45, Incidents of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem. (Chs. 35 and 36 are out of place, here, and belong to the reign of King Jehoiakim.) Chs. 37-45, Jeremiah's personal history during the siege of Jerusalem; Ninth, chs. 46-52, World-wide survey of nations and prophecies concerning them. This book ought to be read through.

The Call (Ch. 1) came to Jeremiah in the little village of Anathoth, north of Jerusalem, where he had his home. He was of priestly descent. He was commanded to form no domestic or social ties (ch. 16:2). He was set apart for such a great work that he must forego all pleasant relations with other people.

The Treatment which he receives from his own

people was hard to hear. His message was ridiculed. The chief governor, Pashur the priest, in the house of the Lord in Jerusalem ordered him to be beaten and placed in the stocks as an object of scorn (ch. 20:1, 2). King Jehoiakim was so contemptuous of the message of Jeremiah that he had received of God (ch. 36), that when but a few pages had been read to him (ch. 36:23) he cut it to pieces with a penknife and threw it into the fire and it was burned up. These are but instances of what Jeremiah was constantly called upon to bear. He was human and of a sensitive nature and he was cut to the quick. No man likes to be ridiculed and laughed at when he is trying to help his fellow men and do God's service.

The Times were sadly out of joint. It is not a pleasant picture which this age presents. Old-time big empires were breaking up. Doubtless many were looking for the end of the world or the death of civilization and the return to barbarism. We are just beginning to realize the extent, in culture, to which these nations had attained. The recent excavations of buried cities and ancient tombs show this.

The World War. Jeremiah's prophecies concern Egypt and Babylon and Assyria, etc. He saw Egypt, in his time, priding herself on her might and power. He saw Assyria and Babylon contending for the mastery of the world. He saw Assyria, the leviathan of empires, crumble and go to pieces before Babylon. He saw Egypt dispute with Babylon and go down before her. He saw these mighty nations kick Judah about as football players kick the leather

ball and with no more concern for it save to win a certain goal. To one not having the key, in this mix-up of nations, it must have seemed a hopeless tangle. Shortly Judah was to be taken captive by Babylon, the mighty. But wait! Just wait! God showed to Jeremiah the key to it all. Read what the prophet says about these great nations—especially Babylon (ch. 50) and note how they are all to go—be wiped clean off the slate and this little nation of Judah is to survive them all. This prophecy has literally come to pass. Yet this is the far-sighted great man, Jeremiah, which his people ridiculed.

The downfall of Jerusalem, the raising of its walls and the destruction of the temple. Everything was to go and did go. Jeremiah predicted it and saw it come to pass. Because he predicted it, he was maligned, ridiculed and persecuted. The people could have prevented it by repentance but they would not repent. Jeremiah prophesied during the reigns of Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiachim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. Under the last king, in 586 B. C., Jerusalem was taken and her walls torn down.

The Mission of Jeremiah (that Jerusalem was to be devastated and the people taken into captivity to Babylon) was not an agreeable one. He was like a clergyman deputed to accompany a criminal to the scaffold who has been convicted of a brutal murder. The man has been proved guilty beyond the shadow of a doubt but he has no sense of regret for his crime and no word of repentance. He turns a deaf ear to all the clergyman has to say and resents his attendance. Judah had sinned and continued to sin fla-

grantly and openly and when the sin was made plain there was no word of regret.

The Outlook of the prophet is marvelous. He has seen the map of the future and just what is going to be done. He can find no comfort or hope in the present for God's purposes cannot be worked out in a year or two. He takes the centuries to bring His plans to pass. The difference between the small man and the big man is the difference in seeing only to-day and beyond to-day into the future—the far distant future.

How did Jeremiah Keep His Faith Under the Hard Limitations with which He Had to Contend? is not so hard to answer when we come to see what that faith was and what it meant to him. He was under the limitations of—to speak humanly—loneliness, ostracism—no one wanted anything to do with him—contempt and ridicule of his fellow men. He was under the limitations of seeing everything which he had learned to love, respect and reverence go by the board. No longer would there be any Holy City or Temple.

He kept his faith and prophesied most enthusiastically of the return of his people from captivity and the glorious future in store for them; First, because he believed he had seen God's map of the future and its brightness so that the darkest immediate present did not trouble him at all. What to-day is the poverty and poor condition of a man who is to come, to-morrow, into a great inheritance? Second—He had learned, what every one must learn in this world, to be at all happy, that material things can

never satisfy an immortal soul. Stripped of all possessions what is a man in his relations to his God? How does he stand in the riches or poverty of his soul? Third—He had come so in touch with God that he was seeing, through God's eyes, what evil and sin and righteousness really are. No man ever fought a harder battle or gained a greater victory than Jeremiah. He had the upward way, open to all, of escape. He took it. Fourth—He never gave up his work.

Practical Applications.—They are many. Multitudes of people are lamenting over their limitations, hard, bitter and oppressive. "We are hemmed in on all sides by relentless limitations." There are the limitations of time—we never have enough of it; physical strength; mental equipment—we cannot think things out as we want to; money! who has sufficient? So many things to do with a too limited equipment to do them. We expand, as much as we can, and yet cannot get beyond our limitations. We are apt to meet our limitations and chafe under them, we go limp, we fight but there they are just the same. The Jeremiah way was to accept them, to be content and work under them making the way of escape upward to God and endeavouring to carry out His purposes right where he was.

Questions.—What can be said of the prophet's burden? What is the question presented? Give the nine parts of the book of Jeremiah. What can be said of Jeremiah's call, treatment, times, mission and outlook? How did Jeremiah keep his faith under hard limitations? What practical applications can be made?

XIII

EZEKIEL

THE MAN WHO HAD GREAT VISIONS

The Boy, Ezekiel, in the City of Jerusalem was of priestly descent. He lived in the time of the good King Josiah. He saw a wonderfully prosperous city. New buildings were going up everywhere of the most solid and ornate construction. The old Temple of Solomon, which had fallen somewhat into disrepair, was being put into fine shape. It was thronged with worshippers. The "Book of the Law" was made prominent. The nation was enlarging its borders. Everything seemed to point to a long era of glorious prosperity. The boy was very proud of his city, and of his country, and he had ample cause to be.

The Man, Ezekiel, in the City of Jerusalem saw all this prosperity come to naught. The people were, as time went on, less and less in earnest about the worship of God and there came a falling away from moral and religious things. Only the shell of religion remained—the old spirituality had departed. King Josiah's head was turned, by the outward prosperity, in the latter part of his long reign of thirty-one years. He was infected by the military spirit which animated the big nations that were about him. A small king of a small nation he dared to meddle in the quarrel of big kings of big nations. He sadly

misjudged events. He went up against the King of Egypt, Pharaoh Necho, as he went to battle with the King of Assyria. Josiah was defeated, after being warned to turn back, and slain at the battle of Megiddo. Jerusalem fell to the Egyptians and all things began to go from bad to worse. The wonderful glory of city and nation rapidly faded away. Again Egypt, waning in power, fell before Babylon and Jerusalem went with Egypt as a minor prize.

The Captive, Ezekiel, on His Way to Babylon.—He is now about twenty-five years of age. Jerusalem could not or would not remain quiet. Her continued agitation against Babylon brought upon her renewed punishment. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, in 597 B. C. came up against the city and carried away all the treasures of the city and the temple, the court, its officers and the craftsmen, leaving only the poorer people. In all about 10,000 captives were taken—Ezekiel was of this number—to Babylon. It was a long and weary journey, on foot, of hundreds of miles. This was the first captivity. The second in 586 was worse in that the walls of the city were razed and the temple torn down.

The Questions Raised in the Minds of Ezekiel and His Fellow Captives were not easy to answer. As they walked by day, on the way to Babylon, and sat by the camp fires at night talking things over there were many things which sorely puzzled them. The trend of affairs was all too plain. The doom of the city and nation seemed fixed beyond the shadow of a doubt; they were but enacting the events of the first chapter. They reviewed the story of Abra-

ham, Isaac and Jacob and of Moses and Joshua. They spoke of the glorious reign of King David. They spoke of all the splendid promises that had been made to them. "And this; and this is the end; captivity to a nation which despises and scorns our God and our religion!" they said. Their mourning and regret, however, seemed all to be for the material prosperity, which, for them, had passed away. There were some who were openly rebellious and denounced their God and their faith in Him. Others were of sad countenance and kept still. Here and there were men and women who declared that faith in God was an affair of the heart and not of the rise or fall of national life or any temple building—no matter how ornate.

The Call to Prophecy did not come to Ezekiel until five years after he had been settled, as a captive by the river of Chebar, not so very far from Babylon. The condition of captivity was not hard. The people were allowed to do business; to acquire land; to marry. They were more like colonists. Still they were in exile—they were far from home and no enforced detention is easy to bear. The same questions debated on the exile journey were still up only in a more intensified form as the years went by. Then suddenly the explanations—the answers of the enforced exile—began to come. This call was very real to Ezekiel—chapter 1. He says—"As I was among the captives by the river Chebar the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God."

The book in which the prophecies are written and visions set forth, consists of three parts:

First, chapters 1-24, Predictions of the fall of Jerusalem. It is now made plain to Ezekiel that the downfall of this city is not due to any lack of God's keeping His promises but through the sins of the people. He has the same message as Jeremiah here. Second, chapters 25-32, Predictions in regard to seven foreign nations—Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon and Egypt. God is not only the God of Israel but of all nations. The same fate, for their sins, will overtake them. Third, chapters 33-48, The restoration of Israel. There is no restoration for other nations. There is an ideal return to the land, an ideal temple built, etc. They who try to press too closely these prophecies miss the spiritual significance of them.

Among the places where Ezekiel made known his prophecies was his own house—where he met the elders—3:24; 8:1; 12:3; 14:1; 20:1.

Great and New Ideas and Ideals—First (Ch. 1)—God is holy, pure, righteous and just. That truth had been emphasized before Ezekiel. Here new light is shed upon it, in other chapters than the first, from the fact brought out that the tabernacle, with its priests and sacrifices, is not absolutely essential to its proper appreciation. God can make Himself known to the individual heart, and His glory shown without external aids. His holiness, purity and justice are not austere and hard—here a new note is struck—for He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked—chapter 33:11. How revolutionary these new ideas were we, in our age, can scarcely conceive. **Second**—Individualism, or individual responsibility for one's

own deeds. "The soul that sinneth—it, and no other soul, shall die." Here a man is no longer bound up with a nation or national life but stands or falls upon what he is in his own heart. See chapters 18:4ff. and 33:10ff. Third—The community of God is "the community of saved and worshipping souls drawn to each other because drawn to their common Lord. This is the real significance of the last nine chapters, with their elaborate description of city and temple. Institutions are not everything but they are something . . . if men are to live and worship in concert." But the life is not in the institution but in the hearts of the individuals who set up and support the institution. Fourth—The terrible power of sin to mar and destroy. This has been shown in the overthrow of Judah.

Hence we see in "The Exile" the rise of the synagogue where there were no sacrifices but free worship of God with free speech in regard to the things of God.

A New Epoch Came in with Ezekiel.—Old things passed away. He, himself, came closely into contact with God. Ritualistic worship, as in the temple, was no good unless the individual soul through it came to see God. This is the truth which he argues over and over again. Some have declared that he puts this truth too bluntly but it was a truth by which he lived and wanted others to live. He saw and believed in God, by the direct method himself, and he wanted others to have the joy he had in doing this.

He no longer looks back with regret to the things

of the past. He looks forward, with a great and increasing joy.

Visions.—To attempt to interpret them would take more space than this study affords. No method of interpretation is without its difficulties while the meaning is not far to seek. Between the visions here and the book of Revelation there is a strong resemblance; the throne of God, the rainbow that encircles it and the four living creatures that attend. We have the same figure of wicked Babylon. There is a judgment of the nations. We have here a temple and there a city, both foursquare and measured with a reed; neither has yet been realized. Ezekiel and John were lifted up to see the greatness of God in time to come. Here is a conflict between sin and evil but there is no doubt of the final victory of those who trust in God. Ezekiel looks further than the end of the captivity; he looks to the end, as John does, of all things—chapters 7 and 26—and it is often difficult to tell which is meant.

For the Accomplishment of Any Important Task There Must Be a Man of Great Visions.—Otherwise there will be very little done. The architect must have quite fully in mind his plan of a skyscraper or cathedral, or the building, which he wishes to erect, before he goes to his drawing-board. The artist visualizes his painting before he takes up his brush; he knows in advance, in vision, what he wants to do. The inventor does not start out to simply invent something—he does not know what—he knows what he is looking for before he begins to try to find it. The hard-headed business man is a visionary

of the largest sort, if he is any good, for he sees ships on shipless seas; he sees tunnels through mountains where none exist; he sees irrigated farms where no farms are; he sees trade—where now is no trade—coming from far to enrich his bank account. Why, because he must see, in vision, before he can get at the reality. Every great patriot has seen in vision that which he wanted to make real for his country.

Ezekiel saw in his visions that which he wanted really to come to pass. Some of these things have come to pass; some remain to be fulfilled.

By his visions he comforted, he instructed, he encouraged, he inspired and led to higher things his people when their spirit was ready to die within them. Ezekiel's visions can do the same for us. No man can have any satisfaction in life unless he is led by the vision of a brighter future which he hopes to make real.

Questions.—Give the experiences of the boy, the man and the captive, Ezekiel. What were the questions raised in the minds of Ezekiel and his fellow captives? Give an account of the call of Ezekiel and the divisions of his book. Give an account of the four new ideas and ideals. What can be said about the new epoch that came in with Ezekiel? What about his visions? Why, for the accomplishment of any important task, must there be a man with visions? What did Ezekiel do with his visions for his people?

XIV

DANIEL

THE MAN WHO MADE ADVANTAGE OUT OF DISADVANTAGE

What Advantage Can There Be in Disadvantage?—Troubles, cares, perplexities and anxieties are continually forcing themselves upon our attention. We do not have to look for them; they hunt us. No matter where or how we try to hide; they find us. The practical question, ever before us, is—How shall we deal with them? Run from them? They can run faster than we can. Fight them? They are stronger than we are and can get the better of us. Lie down? Then they delight in tramping upon us; they show us no mercy. We deal in this study with a man who had a new method of dealing with his troubles. He sought and found an advantage in every disadvantage and he made it serve to lift him up to higher things.

The Teaching of the Book of Daniel, taken as a book, shows how God turns what seem to men to be defeats for Him, into His honour and glory. We do not here enter into the questions of the time of writing this book, the interpretations of the visions or the historical difficulties. They are many. They are great. They are important. They are interesting. But they are aside from our present purpose.

First—The supremacy of God over all men and all nations. We see here mighty kings and nations usurping power over the earth and shouldering aside God's rule as they do now, only, in the end, to be made to serve His purpose. Take the second chapter—"The Dream of Great Empires." Here are earth rulers seemingly governing the world to the disadvantage of "The Kingdom of God" yet at the last—2: 34-46—made of advantage in bringing in "The Universal Messianic Kingdom." In every chapter we see advantage turned to disadvantage. Take the third chapter. It seemed a great pity that "The Three Hebrew Children" should be cast into a fiery furnace, for their faith, yet notice how it turned out in the proclamation of the king for the worship of their God throughout His empire.

Second—Comfort to the captive "Chosen People" that their captivity would turn to their glory, as it did.

The Two Parts.—This book consists of two parts—Part one, chapter 1, Daniel and three youths taken into captivity; chapter 2, The dream of great empires; chapter 3, The fiery furnace and the faithful three; chapter 4, The great tree and the stricken king; chapter 5, The impious feast of a Babylonian king in which he seeks to set God at a disadvantage—verse 3—only to have his kingdom taken from him; chapter 6, Daniel is thrown to the lions for his faith, only to be rescued and have greater honour.

Part two, chapter 7, Vision of the four beasts; chapter 8, The ram and the he-goat; chapter 9, The seventy weeks; chapters 10-12, The last vision. "It

is here taught, right out in the open, that this supreme God of the earth removes kings and sets up kings and that no king can have any power, strength or glory unless it is given to him from above." The coming of a Messianic King who shall set up a world-wide kingdom—to supersede all others—is foretold.

The Person of Daniel.—Picture him. Read the specifications, up to which he had to measure, given by the king. One of the "Children in whom was no blemish but well favoured and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and tongue of the Chaldeans." Such were the instructions given by Nebuchadnezzar to Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, so the story reads, when he gave instructions that certain of the young men of the captives from Jerusalem, about 597 B. C., should be selected—chapter 1:3, 4—for service in his palace. Daniel must have been a man of fine appearance, grace of manners and splendid ability.

Outward Advantages.—They seemed many. Life in an oriental palace where every wish could be gratified. An education in all that the Chaldeans could teach and their learning was not small. An opportunity, if rightly taken, to rise to high office. A chance to become rich, beyond the dreams of avarice. A throng of obsequious servants. But, to the human outlook, and Daniel must have thought deeply on this matter, one must bow to the evil customs of an oriental court and must worship the gods

that, from his childhood, he had been taught were no gods. He must renounce his religion. Was he prepared to give up all that had been taught him about the only Great and True God of his fathers? Here was the puzzle.

It is a modern, perplexing, every-day question to many a young man. What shall he do when asked to do things which are against his principles in order to stay in a certain company or go in society that has no use for his God? See how Daniel answered it.

The Disadvantages of Daniel's Position soon manifested themselves. To a young man of his bringing up and his faith they were bound to appear very quickly—and they did. The temptations of a luxurious life are often more subtle and stronger than in one of hard work and poverty. Pride, arrogance, selfishness, jealousy, hatred and meanness wait upon a life lived in luxury, without a noble thought or aim.

Advantage Out of Disadvantage.—Rich food. Daniel soon saw that the food served from the king's table was a positive detriment to him and his companions. He knew that to refuse it would bring him into disrepute—1:8–21. Why not conform? Why not do as others did? Why make a fuss? These are the questions which come to those who feel the disadvantage of doing what they ought not to do. Note the way in which Daniel got this food question settled and the good that came out of this trouble.

The worship of the one true God for Daniel's companions. The fact that they did not worship the Babylonian idols could not remain under cover long.

It redounded to their disadvantage. They were summoned before the king—chapter 3—and thrown into a fiery furnace. Yet the fact that they remained unhurt caused the king to make a decree that lifted them to great honour. Again out of disadvantage came great advantage.

Daniel's worship of his God to the neglect of the Persian deities—chapter 6—when he passed to the Persian Court from the Babylonian was soon noticed. The jealous courtiers, ever eager to find something against one so eminent soon noticed this and determined to bring about his downfall through it. Here is a case not uncommon in its likeness to everyday life. A man sticking closely to his principles may, for them, be put at a disadvantage. Now when Daniel knew of the plot against him to make him renounce his worship of his God under penalty of being thrown to the lions he paid no attention to it. Surely now this worship was a disadvantage. But Daniel when he went to pray did not even take the trouble to close his window. He was thrown into the lion's den but came out of it unharmed. Result—the exaltation of Daniel and great gain to the cause of the God whom he served and loved. We might take every incident in Daniel's life and find that he ever held a steady course in his belief and deeds and saw in everything the advantage that could come out of disadvantage.

Characteristics of Daniel.—First—Rock-bed convictions of what he ought and ought not to do. There are those who believe strongly but they have no convictions. Second—Willingness to take the

consequences of his belief. Third—Determination to see the thing through to the end—whatever that end might be. Fourth—Hopefulness of the brightest and most cheerful kind. Fifth—Restfulness upon his God that He would see him through. We note an absence of worry in Daniel that is remarkable.

Daniel was no coddled saint but a stalwart one to whom persecution came only to make him of more use.

“This sort of character is the goal to which God will push us, even over rough roads if He must. The goal justifies both His wisdom and the roads.”

Questions.—What advantage in disadvantage? What is the teaching in the book of Daniel? What can be said of the person of Daniel? What were his outward advantages? What were the disadvantages? What advantages came out of the disadvantages of Daniel's position? Give the characteristics of Daniel.

XV

HABAKKUK

THE MAN WHO QUESTIONED GOD'S WORLD POLICIES

Questioning God.—This might stand for the title of the book of Habakkuk. The prophet is very bold. He uses strong language—1:1-4. He says—"The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see. O Lord, how long shall I cry and thou wilt not hear! even cry unto thee of violence and thou wilt not save? Why dost thou show me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? For spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention." This is not the cry of an irreverent but a reverent man who sees evil and wrong and iniquity flourishing and, in spite of the efforts made to check them, growing and increasing. Men see the best and most ably planned campaigns against giant wrongs and evil men, sitting in the places of power, come to naught. This is a cry that goes up in our age, as it did in that long past time. Where is God that He does not do something?

The Problem of Habakkuk is the same as that of Job. Read what this "Man of Undeserved Suffering" says about the evils which have befallen him and for which he can find no human explanation. The difference is, however, that with Job the prob-

lem is personal; here it widens out into social and national evils, which go on unchecked.

Jeremiah who had an evil nation to prophesy against, in Judah, sees his nation punished for its sin by the Chaldeans. But Habakkuk is not satisfied with the fact that his nation will get what it deserves at the hands of the Chaldeans. He wants to know why it is that a wicked nation is selected to punish another wicked nation and what is to become of the big evil nation when it has conquered the little one. Will God let the Chaldeans go unpunished for all their wrongs, which are a multitude? It is a world problem. God is questioned in regard to His government of the world.

The Man and the Prophet.—We know little about Habakkuk save that he was a man of deep religious convictions and statesman-like mind. He lived in Jerusalem and had some connection with the temple—and “the Temple Choir”—chapter 3:19. He had the office of prophet—1:1—and was the eighth of the minor prophets.

His environment was not a happy one. It is generally thought that he prophesied about 600 B. C. In his day he had seen “A World War.” Great nations were contending for the mastery. Egypt and Assyria; then Babylon and Assyria. He had seen the dreaded Chaldean override both Assyria and Egypt. He saw that soon, as it came to pass, the Chaldeans would destroy Judah and Jerusalem. He was in the midst of great world movements.

At home, in Jerusalem, he saw King Jehoiakim playing the fool. When taxes were high and the

people oppressed, Jehoiakim indulged in selfish and lavish personal expenditures. He built a splendid palace with forced and unpaid labour. Religion was at a low ebb. Iniquities, of the most flagrant kind, flourished unchecked. He saw his beloved city and nation headed straight for destruction. He could see no hope in any of the great nations—they were worse than his own.

He was puzzled and disheartened at the state of things. His human nature asserted itself and led to the outcry in chapter 1:1-4.

The Solutions Offered for the Problem.—The book, of three chapters, opens with a dialogue between Habakkuk and God on “The World Policies of God” and the delayed punishment of evil. God is reverently challenged to show cause why “the law is slack and judgment does not go forth?”

First Question—Ch. 1:1-4. The local question of Judah’s punishment for her sins is considered. Why it delays? The prophet asks.

First Answer—Ch. 1:5-11. God replies. The Chaldeans are raised up and will take care of Judah. This is sure to come to pass, as it did. The punishment will be severe.

Second Question—Ch. 1:12-17. Jeremiah, in his book, was satisfied with this first answer but not so Habakkuk. He was not at all pleased. He does not consider that it goes far enough. Notice now that the discussion goes out of personal, social and national and into international and world policies. Habakkuk wants to know how God is going to justify His world policies in raising up and using a wicked

nation for punishment of others. What gain is there in this? He calls attention to the fact that the Chaldeans are wanton in their punishment and that they continually gather the nations into their net, empty it, gather again and worship their net.

Habakkuk now declares that he stands upon his watch-tower to see how God will answer—2:1.

Second Answer—2:3-20. God, in this answer, enters into the principles of "Divine Government and Dealing Justly and Righteously with Men and Nations." The answer is given in the form of a vision which needs to be carefully studied.

The time element—2:3—enters into all God's judgments. He cannot be hurried. Habakkuk need not worry for no wrong shall go unpunished. "Though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come."

The underlying principles of God are that the righteous have the seeds of life in themselves—chapter 2:4—"The just shall live by faith." (Notice how this is used in the New Testament—Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38.) The evil man and nation have the seeds of death, like deadly germ diseases, in themselves which will destroy them. These diseases, their cause and manifestation are put in the form of five "Woes." Because a man and nation transgress these diseases or "Woes" shall come upon them—2:6, 9, 12, 15 and 19. This is a most illuminating explanation. We can see now what Habakkuk could not see. The great Chaldean empire had the seeds of death in it and it has utterly vanished from the face of the earth.

A prayer of Habakkuk—Ch. 3:1, 2. He bows his head before God's wisdom in His world policies.

The vision of God's glory—3:3-16—which the prophet describes. He sees the might and glory of God and that He is in full control. This is a lyric poem of great beauty. Just one or two extracts—3:3—"His glory covered the heavens and the earth was full of his praise." Chapter 3:6, "He stood and measured the earth: he beheld and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting."

The Conclusion of the Whole Matter—Ch. 3:17-19. Habakkuk is so well satisfied with the answers that have been given to him that he feels that he now can stand and face the evils of his time and age and not be daunted by them. It is this attitude, after all, that counts. Human life is but a half-told tale. We are moved so often by outside forces of which we cannot even guess the origin. We are caught in whirlpools and eddies and cannot make headway. We know so little after all of life that we want to know just as far as we can know that, above all, is "a Great, a Good and a Righteous God" who is perfectly capable of taking care of everything and will take care of us. He will see that all wrongs are righted.

The prophet is so thoroughly convinced of this that he concludes with these words—"Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; and the flock shall be cut

off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places."

Questions.—What can be said about questioning God—what was the burden of Habakkuk? What was the problem of Habakkuk—how did it differ from that of Job? What can be said about the man and the prophet—his environment and what he was puzzled about? What solutions were offered for the problem—the first question—the first answer—the second question—the second answer—the prayer of Habakkuk—the vision of God's glory—the conclusion of the whole matter?

XVI

MATTHEW

THE MAN WHO SAW WORLD HOPES REALIZED

From Old Testament to New Testament Characters.—We have an entire change of scene. The old stage is cleared. A new one is set. The mighty empires which fought for the sovereignty of the world have disappeared or become ghosts of their former selves. Babylonia, Assyria, Egypt, Persia, and others, whose great armies shook the earth, when they marched, have gone down. Go now and read Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the rest of the prophets, and note that this failure of mighty empires is just what they said would take place. Note also that they said that, after the captivity, Jerusalem and the temple would be rebuilt in glory and splendour and that Judah would be saved out of the wreck. When Christ saw Jerusalem all this had come true. He saw a city of magnificent beauty. There were huge walls and massive lofty towers. There were marble palaces. Nothing has ever equalled the splendid temple which He saw. The streets are full of life and activity. The Jews enjoy the largest sort of freedom under the Roman Empire which now embraces the territory of all the mighty empires of the Old Testament. They come up to Jerusalem

from all parts of the earth, by the scores of thousands at Passover Time.

The World Saviour.—The new stage was set for “the Chosen People” with their synagogues in every big and many small cities, to accept, make known and urge the acceptance of their own and the “World Saviour in Jesus Christ.” Here was the largest sort of an opportunity to become the dominant race in the propagation of the highest principles and ideals of justice, truth, mercy, love and righteousness. How they deliberately discarded—chapters 8:11, 12; 21:43—this opportunity is a matter of history. The prophets had proclaimed, all of them, “the World Saviour” coming through the Jews. But coming anyway even if “the Chosen People” rejected Him. This is the common teaching of the prophets. The Jews did reject Him and He still remained “the World Saviour.”

He fully realized His world-wide mission when He said, at the close of His career on earth (and before this)—“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”—Matthew 28:19; “And he said unto them, Thus it is written and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem”—Luke 24:46-48; “Ye shall be my witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth”—Acts 1:8. He was always talking, not about the kingdom of the

Jews but about the "Kingdom of God" and "the Kingdom of Heaven."

The Apostle, Matthew.—Did he realize, at the first, the large mission to which he was called? We do not know. He is not here so that we can question him. Who can tell how much any man hopes for when he enters upon a new and promising field of work. The important position which he occupied, on a main route of large travel, would make him a shrewd judge of men and their values. He is not at all the sort of man—evidently of not a little wealth and much good business sense—who would hastily, giving up all, follow Christ, when He called him. Such a man would not easily be swept off his feet. As a Jew, however, he must have been acquainted with the teachings of the prophets and been convinced, from seeing Jesus often in and about Capernaum that He was truly "the Promised Messiah" of whom they spoke. In the book, the Gospel of Matthew, we have, at first, constant references back to the prophets that this is "the Jewish Messiah," then the tone changes and references are evidently to "the World Messiah," one and the same, but in the second place seen in His larger aspect.

The First World Center, Capernaum.—This is the city in which Matthew lived, likewise Peter, James and John. It is the best of all the cities on Lake Galilee whose shores are thickly studded with well-known towns and villages, castles, hippodromes, synagogues, amphitheatres and Greek villas. There are pleasure craft, dispatch and fishing boats and ships of war going to and fro on the surface of the

water. Capernaum, on the northeast shore, is a finely built city where people of all nationalities dwell. It is a station on the great caravan trunk routes, east, west, north and south. What is done here is quickly made known in all the large centers of trade. It is thought to have been chosen by Christ to disseminate His Gospel, as "the First World Center" to send out the good news from its advantageous broadcasting facilities. Jerusalem was not on the big trade routes. Beside Jesus and His claims soon met with hostility there from the priestly party. Matthew, knowing his Capernaum like a book, would be invaluable in the work which Christ sought to do.

The Call of Matthew (Ch. 9:9) came to him while he was attending to his business as customs officer at the "Receipt of Custom" at Capernaum on "the Great West Trunk Road from Damascus and the Far East to the Mediterranean Sea." Here he would get all the news that was going.

Circumstances. Jesus had just healed a man sick of the palsy in the city. Crowds followed Him as He went on His way. Seeing Matthew, at his place of business, He called him—"Follow me." As quickly as He called Matthew arose and followed Him. The suddenness may appear more on the surface than in reality. Doubtless Jesus had had Matthew under observation for some time and Matthew had been seeing the many wonderful things which Jesus did.

Qualifications. To all outward appearances Matthew was not a good choice for he was a hated publican—despised by all so-called "Good Jews."

As one hated and despised he would be a hindrance rather than a help but Jesus looked upon the splendid qualities of Matthew and upon his heart and knew that He had, in this tax-gatherer, a rare man for His purpose.

The Great Feast Given by Matthew (Ch. 9:10; Luke 5:29).—He was not only quick to respond to the invitation of Jesus to follow Him but he wanted every one to know what a signal honour had been bestowed. It was not a feast for a select few and choice friends but “There was a great company of publicans and others who sat down with them.” Some men are warped and twisted by their business. Their worst side comes out in their dealings with men. Take Matthew and this feast and see how everything shows him as he is and that being “a Despised Publican” in business had not touched the nobleness of his soul. Suppose that every one whom Jesus calls, and who accepts this call into His fellowship and Church, should respond as Matthew did in celebrating the occasion in a way that would make his rejoicing known to all his friends? What splendid progress would be made. What is needed to-day is Christians with the enthusiasm of Matthew.

Discordant voices. Then as now when a man really gets enthusiastic in a good cause there are those who find fault. The Pharisees and Scribes, looking only on outward things, murmured against this feast, given by Matthew, that Christ and His disciples should attend and eat with publicans and sinners. It is the same old world. There are those

who do nothing to help on a good cause and find fault with those who do.

Matthew in the Training School.—From the time of his call until Jesus ascended—Acts 1:1-8—Matthew was constantly with Jesus.

He learned the principles of the kingdom from “the Sermon on the Mount”—chapters 5-7. 1—chapter 5:2-12, The righteousness of “the Kingdom of Heaven” described; its rewards announced. 2—chapter 5:13-16, The righteousness as exhibited in life. 3—chapters 5:17-6:18, Relation of this new righteousness to that of the Old Testament. 4—chapter 6:19-34, Relation of this new righteousness to secular life. 5—chapter 7:1-23, Teaching of the new righteousness; precepts and warnings to disciples. 6—chapter 7:24-27, Consequences of the acceptance or rejection of the precepts of the new righteousness.

He was sent out to work out that which he had been taught by Jesus—chapters 10:1-11:1. Matthew was one of “the Twelve” sent out to proclaim “the Good News of the Coming Kingdom.” They were to do as they had seen Christ do.

Nothing was left to chance. The apostles were men under the tutelage of the Master to carry on His work after He had left the earth.

Matthew Saw World Hopes Realized in Jesus Christ; that is, he began to see them realized. They are not yet fully realized. The movement is so large that it will take the ages for their complete fulfillment.

Take “the Gospel of Matthew” (under the most

drastic criticism the bulk of its material is still conceded to Matthew, the apostle). It may be divided into three parts: 1—chapters 1:1–4:16, Early Days of the Messiah. 2—chapters 4:17–16:20, Signs and Works of the Messiah. 3—chapters 16:21–28:20, Passion of the Messiah.

We see here the flowering of the Old Testament History. All that the prophets had said of Jesus Christ comes true in Him. Passage after passage is quoted in Matthew of the Old Testament prophecy to prove that in Jesus Christ we have the Promised Messiah. A Messiah who was to bless the whole world through “the Chosen People.” But as time goes on and Jesus Christ develops His principles and ideals the nation to which He has come is seen to draw back from Him and finally to reject Him. The Christ that was to make this nation the leading nation of the world is rejected by it, and with this rejection forfeits its great mission—chapter 8:11, 12.

The mission of Jesus Christ as “The World Saviour,” is not thereby thwarted but becomes more emphatically a world affair.

The religion of Jesus is not merely the Judaism of the temple plus a belief in Jesus as “the Messiah” but a world religion, freed from all bounds and restrictions, local and national. The book of Matthew carries the doctrine of the apostle Paul to the conclusion which he saw in it but to which he was not wont himself to press it. Again before this time each nation had its own gods to whom it looked for succour and help. The conception of a World Religion was not thought of. When the nation died

its gods died as they did in Babylonia and Assyria. But here was a World Messiah who survived the nation to which He was accredited, and appealed to all nations and made good in His appeal.

The World Messiah in Our Own Age.—The message of Matthew comes to us with the same pertinency that it came to men of old. So it will come in the future. Jesus Christ is the Saviour of all mankind—to all who trust in Him. All else may fail but He will not fail. He will not be judged by any age or civilization but will judge every age and every civilization. His last command is still sounding forth—"Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:18-20).

Questions.—What can be said for the change from Old to New Testament characters? What can be said of the world Saviour? What of the world apostle, Matthew? What of the first world center, Capernaum? What can be said of the call of Matthew—circumstances and qualifications? What of the great feast, given by Matthew? What of Matthew in the training school? How did Matthew see world hopes realized in Jesus Christ? What can be said of the world Messiah in our own age?

XVII

MARK

THE MAN WHO WROTE OF CHRIST'S POWER

A New Way of Looking at Christ.—Mark presents a different aspect of Christ from that of Matthew, Luke, John or Paul. The emphasis is placed upon what He is, in Himself, and upon His authority. The genealogy is omitted. Little is said about the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. After the announcement—"The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (ch. 1:1), and a few verses about the work of John Baptist, we read of the exercised power of the Christ: "And they were astonished at his doctrine for he taught them as one that had authority and not as the scribes" (ch. 1:22). "And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? For with authority commandeth he the unclean spirits and they do obey him" (ch. 1:27). This has been called "The Gospel to the Romans" because Jesus Christ was presented in this way. The Romans never asked about the ancestry of a man; they wanted to know what he was in himself and what he could do. This is the modern way of looking at a man.

The Writer, Mark.—He is not an apostle. He holds no official position. The Gospel, however, has

been ascribed to him from the earliest times. He had ample opportunity to know the truth of the things about which he wrote. He lived in Jerusalem. His mother had a house there. She was a woman of considerable wealth. Her home was the rallying place of the early leaders of the Church. Here Mark met them and heard everything talked over. A large prayer-meeting was in progress there, one night, when Peter, having been released from prison by an angel, came knocking at the door of the gate. Mark could never forget that experience and the rejoicing over Peter's release. The narrative does not say but Mark may have often seen Jesus and heard His words. His cousin, Barnabas, who went on the first missionary journey with Paul was a wealthy Levite from the island of Cyprus (Acts 12: 1-17; 4: 36, 37; 13: 1-5). Who could know better than Mark of all the things which were making such a wonderful stir in Jerusalem? These things were not done in a corner.

The Traveler.—He was in many parts of the Roman Empire. We read of him in Jerusalem, in Antioch, in Ephesus, in Rome and in other places. He had a wide experience with men in all classes of life. In his home city, Jerusalem, he had his eyes opened to the wonderful power in Christ. In Antioch he saw how that power could take hold upon men and women who were not of the household of Judæa and had not been trained in its traditions (Acts 11: 20-26; 13: 1-5). We find Mark with Paul in Rome (Col. 4: 10; Phil. 24) and later on with Timothy in Ephesus (2 Tim. 4: 11). He is also recorded by

Peter as being with him in Babylon (Rome) (1 Peter 5:13).

The Close Companion of Peter for ten or twelve years. This is the time that elapsed between the last mention of Mark in the Acts and Paul's reference to his coöperation in Rome. In out-of-the-way places in the country, in villages, and in big cities Mark had noticed, could not help but notice, how the marvelous power of Jesus Christ gripped the hearts and consciences of the people to whom He was presented. They accepted Him for what He was in Himself. They did not have to go back and get Him through Judaism. The modern disciple of Christ makes this direct appeal to-day.

The Ministry of Mark in Service.—We do not read anywhere of Mark speaking or taking the leadership, as Barnabas or Paul or Peter, or Timothy did. He is never at the forefront. His is the ministry of service, the observer of what others are doing, and making things comfortable for them that they may do their more conspicuous work well. He doubtless arranged the travel routes and looked after the details of getting lodgings and places and opportunities to deliver the message. The tradition tells us that even the message which he has given us, in what is called his Gospel, is what Peter preached in his ten or twelve years of association with him.

And yet how marvelously the light of his life shines forth! The man who was willing to serve those who did the more conspicuous things now takes rank alongside them and not one whit behind them. This Gospel of Mark may be what Peter preached,

it doubtless is, but it is put in shape by a master hand. In its present shape it is declared to be the first of the Gospels. Could any man—just striving to serve as his Master did—have greater honour?

The Book of Mark is put together with great skill. The story moves with rapidity. It is picturesque. It is condensed. It is abrupt. After the introduction 1:1-13 it has three natural divisions; 1—The ministry in Galilee, 1:14-9:50. 2—The ministry in Judæa, 10:1-52. 3—The ministry in Jerusalem, 11:1-16:20. This is the shortest Gospel—sixteen chapters. Matthew has twenty-eight. Luke twenty-four. John twenty-one. The narrative is confined to the most active period of Jesus' life, chiefly to the busy Galilean ministry and the still more crowded Passion Week.

Characteristics.—1—Vividness. There is a succession of pictures of what Christ did which have peculiar lifelike and graphic qualities. We are made to see things, by Mark, as if they were directly under our own eyes. 2—Compactness. Every sentence is fraught with meaning. 3—Directness. There is no attempt at elaboration. It is a businesslike narrative of things as Mark saw them or heard of them from Peter and others. Christ teaches and heals and immediately His fame spreads through all Galilee (Ch. 1:28). In the first chapter, typical of all the rest, we find condensed the stories of the opening of the ministry of Christ, the coming of John Baptist, the temptation of Christ and the beginning of Christ's ministry in Galilee. 4—Celerity. Here is movement; action; life. Christ speaks and there is instant

obedience. The words—"Straightway" and "Immediately" are used over forty times to show how quickly the results, which are desired, are accomplished. 5—Circumstantiality. Mark tells "How the multitude who were to be fed sat down in groups like flower beds 'upon the green grass'; how our Lord amid the tempest was sleeping 'on the cushion' in the stern of the boat; how when they brought unto Him 'little children,' He took them up in His arms and blessed them. Only in Mark are we told that Jesus was a carpenter and that, during His temptation, He was with the wild beasts." The instances of such touches are legion.

The Message of Mark is the Working of the Power of Christ for helping men to find themselves and God. That they may be freed from the evils which take them by the throat and choke out their moral and spiritual lives. It is a ministry of redeeming love and saving grace. It is authority, coupled with unlimited power, used not in selfishness and the upbuilding of the one who has it but for the largest and noblest ends. The trouble, in this world, is that men who get just a little authority too often use it to oppress and crush their fellow men. "We are reminded of the words of Peter relative to 'The Master'—God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power: who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him."

Instances of the Manifestation of Christ's Power are given by Mark.

The manifestation is in two parts. We have

to consider both—Divine Power and Human Power.

The Human Power. He had the human side and manifested it in a remarkable way. He was hungry. He was tired. He slept. He ate. He loved the companionship of His fellow men. He had compassion. He sympathized with the woes of the people.

The Divine Power was equally manifest and used to help. In the short space of sixteen chapters there are nineteen miracles recorded; a number of them with great circumstantiality. Mark expresses no doubt in regard to them. Here are some of the instances which Mark tells us about, in his book—1—"Jesus taught as one that had authority and not as the scribes" (1:22). He ordained others to teach and to heal (3:13-15). 2—The unclean spirits acknowledged His power (1:27). The great trouble in society, family and state is that of unclean men and women. They refuse to obey and foul the water of the springs of life. 3—Power to heal the sick (1:30, 31, 34). There is moral and mental sickness as well as physical sickness. Heal the first two and the other would largely disappear. Christ did cure all three. 4—Power to forgive sins. Christ did not leave this in doubt (2:5-10). 5—Power over nature (4:36-40). Many instances are given. He stilled the storm on Galilee. He multiplied the loaves and fishes. Why should these stand as such impossibilities to some people? What were once miracles—"The Wireless," the "Heavier than Air Flying Machine," etc., etc., are now commonplaces.

A miracle may not be contrary to nature while it may be contrary to what we know about nature. We know really so little about the order of nature, even the wisest—Why stumble at the miracles of Christ? Herbert Spencer once said to a friend: "You cannot take up any problem in physics without being quickly led to some metaphysical problem that you can neither solve nor evade." Mark verily believed and taught that "The Lord of Glory" had come to earth and that nothing was impossible to Him. But here is the astonishing thing that this Lord of Glory laid aside His glory and used His power to help men to better lives. 6—Power to raise the dead (5: 22-24, 35-42), and power to raise Himself from the dead in His resurrection. This was what Mark taught from hearing it preached and seeing the Gospel in its earliest manifestations.

The Hunt for Power is on.—Man is searching everywhere for it. Coal, oil, gas, water, iron ore, land and sea interest him only as he can wring from them their secrets of power. He will spend time, unlimited money, and energy if he can see the slightest prospect of making use of any of these agencies for more power. He searches everywhere for this treasure or storehouse of power. He wants to connect up. But here in Jesus Christ is a storehouse of power that wants to be connected up with man and help him to find himself first in the Kingdom of God and then the rest will be easy. This also is the teaching of Mark and is one reason why he is so tremendously in earnest about his message.

Questions.—What is the new way of looking at

Christ? What can be said of the writer, Mark? Mark, the traveler? Mark, the close companion of Peter? What can be said of the ministry of Mark in service? The book of Mark? Characteristics of the book? What is the message of Mark? Give instances of the manifestation of Christ's power. What can be said for the hunt for power?

XVIII

LUKE

THE MAN WHO BROADCASTED THE GOSPEL GOOD NEWS

“**Luke, the Beloved Physician,**” is what Paul calls him when he was in prison in Rome and wrote the letter to the Church in the city of Colosse. This shows how dear Luke was to Paul. It is a human touch and shows how strong one man’s affection may be for another (Col. 4:14).

The author of the messages, in the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, broadcasted over the ancient and modern worlds, as no other messages have been, was a careful, conscientious doctor. He was not only large of heart and of great spiritual vision but he had a literary ability of a high order.

He was a Gentile; a Greek by birth. He was a man of some wealth or else he would not have been able to attend upon Paul and go with him as he did from place to place. He probably bore not only his own expenses but helped to bear those of Paul. He is an example of how the preaching of Jesus Christ affected all classes, high and low, in those times.

He was an accurate and painstaking observer, trying always to make sure of his facts before setting them down. This he declares in the preface to his Gospel—Luke 1:1-4. He is after “The Certainties.”

In the Acts of the Apostles he is careful to use "We" when he is with Paul and "They" when he is not.

In regard to his standing as a physician Dr. Hobart has written a book on "The Medical Language of St. Luke" in which he gives testimony to Dr. Luke's accuracy in the use of medical terms as compared with those used by Galen, Hippocrates and other ancient medical writers of note.

The esteem in which he is held to-day is not only shown in the multitude of "St. Luke Churches" but also in the multitude of "St. Luke Hospitals" of which one is in almost every city in the United States and they are scattered over the world.

Antioch, the City of Luke, where tradition has it that he exercised his profession, was the third city in point of population (500,000) and importance in the Roman Empire. It was the second great center of Christianity. It was from here that Christian influences were broadcasted that have influenced the world for all time. It is this broadcasting influence of which Luke tells us in the Acts of the Apostles.

The title by which Antioch was known, in those times, was "The Gay City." A strange place in which to start a great Christian campaign for the conversion of the world. It was about three hundred miles north of Jerusalem and sixteen miles from the Mediterranean Sea on the Orontes River. It traded with all parts of the world by ships and caravans. There were many fine public buildings. There was great wealth. Art and literature were

cultivated. But everything was made to promote and foster "Gilded Vice." About four miles away was "The Grove of Daphne" known throughout the world as the place where all that was most beautiful in art and nature had created the magnificent gardens where there was held a continual festival of vice. Juvenal, a great Roman writer, complains that the iniquities and dissipations of Antioch were corrupting Rome.

Yet Luke tells us how into this "Gay City" (Acts 11:19-29) the Christian missionaries came with their message and "A great number believed and turned to the Lord." So many came in that outside help was sent for and Paul came. It shows that the Gospel can work under the most unfavourable conditions and where there is seemingly nothing to work upon. Christianity in those days did not hesitate to go into the worst places in the most corrupt cities. It has the same power to-day if we will use it.

Luke's Preparation for Work.—He was many years in getting ready to do what he did. His was no hasty task easily accomplished.

He was a traveling companion of Paul who had come, on his second missionary journey, as far as Troas, in Mysia in Asia Minor. Here Paul saw the vision which called him to undertake a new work (leaving Asia) on the continent of Europe. It was a bold venture into the region of the highest culture of Greek civilization. If beauty, if art of the highest type, if philosophy could have saved men they would not have needed the Gospel. But with all this cultivation there was the utmost corruption of morals.

The social evil was made a part of worship in the temples.

Luke met Paul in Troas—note the change from “They” in chapter 16:6–9 to “We” in chapter 16:10ff. We can always tell when Luke is of the party by his use of the “We.” Luke went to Philippi with Paul where the first church in Europe was organized (Ch. 16: 12–40). Luke was left in Philippi. Notice the seventeenth chapter begins the “They” again. Luke remained at Philippi for a number of years, or until Paul returned to this city (Ch. 20:6) and “We” sailed away from Philippi.

From this second meeting, until the death of Paul, Luke seems to have been with him. He was with him when Paul went up to Jerusalem for the last time. He was with him when he sailed away from Cæsarea after Paul had been imprisoned for two years in that city. Luke was with Paul on his journey to Rome, and in Rome. He was with him in his first imprisonment (Col. 4:14 and Phil. 24). He was with him in his last imprisonment, when it was dangerous (2 Tim. 4:11).

Luke, certainly, had abundant opportunities to see and know how Christianity worked in big and little places and amongst all classes and conditions of people.

The Doctor's Pastorate at Philippi for seven years. It is not an easy thing to step out of one's chosen profession and into another and make a success. But Luke through his love for Christ did this. The city of Philippi was an important one on the Great Egnatian Road and travelers and traders

passed over it eastward and westward from all parts of the Roman Empire. It was a center of a large life and activity. One secret of Luke's influence to-day is due to the fact that he not only knew the theory of Christianity but also had applied it and seen it applied under the most difficult and adverse circumstances and it had worked in every case.

The Messages which Luke had to give to the world are found in two books which it is supposed were begun to be put into shape at the time he was in attendance upon Paul in his two years' imprisonment in Cæsarea. He would have ample time to look up scenes and incidents of Christ's life in places where they occurred and consult those still living who had seen and heard Christ. He could also go over with Paul the accounts of his journeyings when he was not with him.

The Gospel of Luke. There is a logical order of events. After the introduction (Ch. 1:1-4) there are six natural divisions. 1—1:5-2:52—Narrative of the birth, childhood and youth of John Baptist and Jesus. 2—3:1-4:13—Preparation for Christ's public work. 3—4:14-9:50—Christ's Galilean Ministry. 4—9:51-19:27—Christ's Journey to Jerusalem. 5—19:28-23:56—Passion Week. 6—24:1-53—Resurrection and ascension of Christ.

The Acts of the Apostles. This book may be divided into three parts taking for its text chapter 1:8. 1—The work in Jerusalem (Ch. 1:1-7:60). 2—The work in Judæa and Samaria (8:1-12:25). 3—The work in the world at large—The Three Missionary Journeys of Paul (13:1-28:31).

The Appeal is to the Certainties.—Luke does not plead. He does not argue. He wants us to consider the facts (Luke 1:1-4). The certainty of the reality of Christ; here is no dim and indistinct figure but one standing forth as real; His is the strong personality about which events and persons group themselves. The Certainty of Christ's mission (Luke 4:16-21). He declares that He, Christ, is "The Anointed One." The certainty of Christ's power.

Characteristics. A world-wide ministry. Christ opened His Gospel with this declaration (4:16-21). He closed it by saying that His name should be proclaimed "Amongst all nations" (24:47, 48). Glad tidings for all men. The opening chapters of Luke record "how Christ came into the world heralded by songs of rejoicing; "The Ave Maria," "The Magnificat," "The Benedictus," "The Gloria in Excelsis" and "The Nunc Dimittis." Again Luke tells us that Christ departed lifting up His hands in blessing (Luke 24:50). Sympathy with the poor and outcast and suffering.—Note the parables of the "Lost Sheep," the "Lost Coin," the "Lost Boy," the "Good Samaritan," etc. Good will and tolerance. Praise and thanksgiving. Prayer. Womanhood, etc.

What Luke Stood for in Himself.—Thoroughness in what he undertook. He was very careful to try in every way to keep his writings from error. Cheerfulness; there are able, good, righteous men and women who are conscientious in what they do but they are not pleasant of disposition or countenance but Luke called—"The Beloved Physician" by one who knew him best has a sunny way with him.

He believed the Gospel was given—"To make us of good cheer." Helpfulness where help was needed most; he was an educated physician yet he saw that he could help the world the most by preaching Christ and working for Him. Courage; notice how Paul wrote to Timothy in his last imprisonment—and not so long before his death—"Only Luke is with me;" Luke was not afraid to stand by Paul when he endangered his own life by doing so. Faith, strong, reliable and unwavering.

Questions.—What can be said of Luke—what does Paul call him—of what books is he the author—what does Dr. Hobart say of his medical knowledge? Describe the city of Antioch—what had it to do with early Christianity? What can be said of Luke's preparation for his work? How long was Dr. Luke pastor of the church at Philippi? What can be said of the messages of Luke? Into how many parts may Luke's Gospel be divided? How many parts the Acts? To what does Luke appeal? What certainties? What are the characteristics? **What** did Luke stand for in himself?

XIX

JOHN .

THE MAN WHO LISTENED-IN ACROSS THE VOID

Getting into Touch with the Infinite.—Man lives in a world of mystery. It is permeated with strange forces which he is trying to understand and with which he is trying to connect. Sometimes he is successful and sometimes he is not. When he succeeds he seems but to open a door to still more mysterious forces.

Take an instance of these strange things. A man sits in a quiet room. It is remote from the street. All unknown to him that room is vibrating with sounds. A great orator is making a speech five hundred miles away and every word is repeated in this room. A thousand miles away a concert, of the best musical talent, is being given and it is being reproduced here. The air is crowded with voices. Yet the man sitting, in this room, professes that he hears nothing. It is to him as if these sounds did not exist. Now let him take a certain apparatus, made in a certain way, to interpret these sounds and, strange to say, the room leaps into life. He is in tune with the great orator and hears every word. He shuts off the oratory and now he "Listens-in" at the concert, hearing all. What the "Radio-Man" has done for the man in the quiet room John pro-

posed, long before this new thing had come to life, to do for the material man who did not realize the spiritual things about him.

John was a pioneer worker. For many men he is still a pioneer. Men do not use "The Spiritual Radio" even when its use is explained but to those who do there is a new and wonderful world opened.

John carries over "The revelation of Christ from the world of outward fact to that of inward religious experience." He gives this out as his definite purpose. He is not writing at random, just to make a history of what he saw, but "These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:31). The great work of Christ is to impart life. Man in the silent room of a material world, through Christ, has that room leap into life with voices which put him into tune with "The Infinite."

Preparation of John in Contact With John Baptist.—In order to do any work which is worth while, and lasting, a man must have a certain adequate preparation. Nothing worth while can be done offhand. He must know all angles of that which he wishes to do if he is to be highly effective.

John began the preparation for his ministry, for all ages and all nations, as a disciple of John Baptist. How long he was with him we do not know. We do know that in John Baptist he came in contact with a wonderful personality who had "Listened-in" to a message that was given to him from "On High" and who was giving this message to the people of

Palestine. So effective was he in doing this that multitudes of people came to hear him in a desolate place by the river Jordan. Still more wonderful they did that which it is not easy to get men to do—"They came confessing their sins." John Baptist was counted "A Prophet." He had gotten into tune with "The Infinite One." All this John, who was to become an apostle of Christ, saw and heard.

Jesus Invites John to Find the Way.—The second stage in the preparation of John was when he came in contact with Jesus Christ for the first time. When all Palestine was flaming into praise with the name and exploits of John Baptist. It was bruited abroad that he was the long expected Messiah. What was John's astonishment to see him bow his head before Jesus of Nazareth (Ch. 1:28-36). He doubtless was very much puzzled to hear John Baptist say (Ch. 1:29): "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the World" and just before this (Ch. 1:27): "He it is who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose." It was as if he had said: "The Master to whose voice I have been listening has come."

Two disciples, one of whom was John, just wondered, wondered, what it could mean! What more natural than that they should follow Jesus to find out (Ch. 1:37, 38).

Jesus' invitation to "Come and see" resulted in their "Listening-in" to "The Voice" which led John to do his great work for all people. Such was the impression made by this first interview that the exact

hour of the day is put down—"The Tenth"—which is four o'clock.

The School of Discipleship or "the Try Out."—Note how gradually things proceed. Every event comes in order. There is no hurry. Jesus had quite a following of disciples before He chose—"the Twelve Apostles" (Luke 6:13-16). He seems to have been trying out the disciples, of whom John was one, to finally select those whom He could trust with "The Great Mission." This crowd of disciples went with Him and saw the mighty works which He did. It was "The Try Out" the same as men are under observation and trial for important places to-day.

The Home Life of John was a happy one. He came from a "Well-to-Do" family. They had boats and hired servants. The occupation of fishing was lucrative (Mark 1:19, 20). Zebedee, the father, made not the slightest objection to his sons, James and John, going with Jesus. The mother, Salome, was a follower of Jesus, going even to the cross (Matt. 27:56; Mark 15:40, 41). It is a great thing when home influences are in favour of spiritual thinking and living.

Called to Be an Apostle.—John was one of twelve whom Jesus chose to be with Him and to be trained for "A World-Wide Campaign for the Conversion of the World." The two sons of Zebedee and Salome were named second and third in the list of the chosen ones. How important this choice was we are just beginning to see. These are the names which the world cherishes and perpetuates above

those of great rulers, generals, poets, artists, merchant princes and the so-called "Mighty Ones" of this earth. It is not to be supposed that "The Twelve" realized to what an undying fame they were called.

We have to remember that these men had been with Jesus, as disciples, and had listened to His teaching and seen the miracles which He did (Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:13-16). Matthew tells us in the tenth chapter that as soon as "The Twelve" were chosen they were sent out, "Having been given power against unclean spirits to cast them out and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease."

John was very close to his "Master." He was present at "the Transfiguration." He, with Peter, was sent to make ready for "the Lord's Supper." He was in the "Garden of Gethsemane" with Christ. John was the first to recover himself after the arrest of Christ. He was present at His trial. He was the only apostle who dared follow Christ to the cross. He received the charge of Christ to care for His mother.

After the resurrection he saw and talked with Christ and knew Him without doubt. He, with Peter, went boldly into the temple and proclaimed the Christ—Acts, chapter 3. Peter and John were sent for to go into Samaria to help in the great work there—Acts 8:14. When Paul went to Jerusalem about 50 A. D. John was there and met him—Galatians 2:1-9.

Pastor of the Church in Ephesus.—John, the apostle, settled in Ephesus late in the sixties accord-

ing to the testimony of such well-known men in the Church as Irenæus, Papias, Polycrates of Ephesus and Clement of Alexandria. Here also Andrew and Philip are said to have lived in their later years. This church was founded by Paul—Acts 19. Here, in all probability, John wrote his Gospel.

This city was the third great center of Christianity. Here was held a "Perpetual Vanity Fair." Its theater, seating 50,000 spectators, was a wonder. Its stadium was dedicated to "Reality"; men fought with wild beasts to the death; men fought with men to the death; all scenes were acted out in reality. Its temple of Diana, one of the wonders of the world (324 feet long and 164 feet wide), was filled with the most exquisite works of art, yet its worship was of a shapeless image and grossly immoral. A queer place in which to preach the Gospel of Christ, yet Paul won many people here and from this city the influence of the Gospel which John preached has been world wide.

The Book Message of John.—We take here only the Gospel. We have seen what a splendid preparation John had for the message he finally gave to the world. Without this ample preparation he could not have given it. The great questions which John considered were hotly debated in his day: they have lost none of their heat after the many centuries that have elapsed since he was on earth. They are the burning issues of to-day. This Gospel would not stand as it does unless John had brought up these questions. Every possible means has been employed to bring it into discredit but the great thing at issue

is not the box or the "Radio Apparatus" in any of its parts but does it connect up with that which without it would be unheard? That John's Gospel does connect up and bring us into tune with "the Infinite One" has been shown over and over again. It works for those who will let it work.

Great Questions Asked and Answered.—These are timeless and ageless. These questions are the vital ones of the Christian faith. The answers are equally vital. Over fifty years had passed since Christ had left the earth in bodily form when John's Gospel was issued. Questions of His relations to the Jewish World had ceased to be of interest.

Christianity was claiming to be "the Universal Religion." Where Matthew and Luke left off and Mark began—there John began. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." Here is what Christianity has to say in regard to God, life and destiny.

First—Who is Jesus Christ? How is He related to God? In the first eighteen verses of the first chapter we have the clear-cut answer—see the first verse quoted above—"In him was life and the life was the light of men"—John 1:1-18; see 1:4.

Second—How can man know God? See the third chapter—Christ's talk with Nicodemus. Religion is not merely a matter of form and ceremony; it is a thing of a new heart and a new life—"Listening-in" to get into tune with "the Infinite."

Third—Who is God? Can anything be more plain than Christ's answer—"God is a spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

Are you "Listening-in" to hear "the Spirit of God"?

Fourth—Where and how worship God?—chapter 4:19-26. Everywhere and always there is free access to God.

Fifth—Does God really care for man? Chapter 3:16—"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." See also "the Good Shepherd parable"—chapter 10:1-18.

Sixth—Is man personally immortal? The eleventh chapter is taken to help answer this question—"I am the resurrection and the life"—chapter 11:25. See also fourteen—one where Christ declares "In my Father's house are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you." See also Christ's resurrection. "Listen-in" for yourself.

Characteristics. Ruggedness—he was called a "Son of Thunder." Lovableness—he leaned on Jesus' breast at the supper table. He is the loved disciple. His courage—he was the only apostle that dared to go to the cross with his Master. His spiritual insight; that was marvelous.

Questions.—What can be said of getting into touch with "the Infinite"? What of the preparation of John with John Baptist? How did Jesus invite John to find the way? Give an account of the school of discipleship—Home life of John—How John was called to be an apostle. Of what church was John the pastor? What about the book message of John? What are some of the great questions **and answers in the book?** Characteristics of John?

XX

PETER

THE ASCENDING MAN

The Way of a Man—Up or Down?—When a man is being considered for any position the question is always asked—Which way is he going—up or down? It is not so much where he is now as where he is headed for. There is no standing still in life. Hence the search, when any place worth while is open, for a man, to fill it, who has not reached the limit of his power and capability and who has ambition to walk in the upward way. This ascending ambition is not considered solely in regard to its intellectual, commercial, political or other aspects, but other things are looked at which pertain to the heart purposes and the moral and spiritual outlook. A man may go up in things that have to do only with material prosperity and meet his own soul coming down—which he soon must follow.

It is evident, in Peter, that Jesus saw, what others might not have seen, a man of large ascending ambition with a moral and spiritual outlook, which if given proper objectives would carry him far. He did not look upon what Peter was or his occupation but what Peter, under proper influences and training, might become. That Jesus was justified in His estimate of Peter as "the Ascending Man" is evi-

dent from the story of Peter which we find in the New Testament. He had his excellencies which were diligently cultivated to make them stepping-stones to things higher up. He had his faults, he was intensely human, in which he did not continue but bitterly repented as he went on up.

It is not what a man is, the circumstances under which he is born, his occupation or the place where he lives that count so much as what he desires to become and his determination to walk in the way of the man going up in spite of all the difficulties which he may encounter.

From all points of view the story of Peter is well worth careful study for our encouragement to keep on the upward way.

Peter—the Fisherman.—If you had been a visitor in Capernaum, in New Testament times, and gone out, early in the morning, to the shore of Lake Galilee and seen Peter, with the other men, coming ashore from his boat and been told that he would have a name and fame that would be world-wide, you would doubtless have said—"Nonsense, such a thing is impossible." But the impossible has come to pass.

Consider this man not as crude and uncouth, as some have tried to make him out. His occupation of fishing required courage, vigour of body and a resourceful mind. The shore of Galilee was almost like one continuous city and Peter would constantly come in contact with the best life of his day. He owned his own boat and might have had helpers.

He was a religious man; a member of the Capernaum Synagogue. He attended the big revival held by John Baptist by the River Jordan.

His home was in Capernaum where he owned a house. He was married and his wife's mother lived with him—Matthew 8:14; Mark 1:28, 30. His wife evidently loved the work of Christ as he did, and accompanied him on his missionary tours, while Paul was on his, for Paul speaks of her—1 Corinthians 9:5—as being with him.

Peter and his brother, Andrew, were partners with James and John working out from Bethsaida, the fishing quarter of Capernaum—Luke 5:7-11; John 1:44.

Disciple of John Baptist and of Jesus.—The quartet of fishermen—Peter, Andrew, James and John—were attracted by John Baptist when he gave his great message of repentance by the River Jordan. How long they were with him we do not know—John 1:29-51.

When Jesus came to John Baptist He found there these fishermen intent upon knowing the way of the upward life. They were not satisfied simply with the material side of things but they wanted to know the way of the spiritual life—John 1:35-42. Eager as they were—these men in their prime—for gain they were more eager to know the way of life. Jesus seems, at once, to have seen what Peter might become in his work for Him—John 1:40-42.

In this matter of discipleship many were attracted both to John Baptist and Jesus and seem to have been more or less closely attached to them, not how-

ever giving up their whole time to them, to the exclusion of their occupations.

The Apostle of the First Place.—Peter was chosen as the first apostle and retained this primacy until the last—Matthew 10:1-5; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-17. We do not know all the reasons why Peter was chosen to head the list of apostles but we do know that he had a very warm heart. He loved Jesus with all the strength of his nature. He had a keen mind—it almost flew to a conclusion.

Take the discourse of Jesus at Capernaum on “the Bread of Life”—John 6:22-65—full of hard sayings and where He shattered the hopes of the Jews that He was come as “their Worldly Messiah.” Many turned away from Him—John 6:66. Seeing many turn away—and maybe the apostles wavering—Jesus said—“Unto the twelve, will ye also go away?” It was a critical moment. Peter at once saw the gravity of the occasion and the tremendous issue at stake and replied—“Lord, to whom shall we go? thou alone hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God”—John 6:68, 69.

Jesus takes Peter with Him on His journeys. He sees and hears all that is done. He is a man whom He can trust—there is never any doubt about the fidelity of Peter under any and all situations. He was never afraid that he would betray his trust. He is with Jesus at His Transfiguration, in the Garden of Gethsemane and at the Resurrection.

The Great Confession.—This is the crowning point in Peter’s career when he states clearly and

plainly—perceiving clearly—who Jesus is and what His mission is. Here again is shown the keenness of his mind and the warmness of his heart.

Jesus asks of His disciples near Cæsarea Philippi —“Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?” Certainly this is a question right to the point and it needs a plain and convincing answer. It is a question that Jesus is ever asking in every age and of all men. It is hotly debated. Some are not sure. Some are very sure. But when it was first asked it was answered by Peter who had every opportunity to know how to answer it. He had heard and had seen all the wonderful things that Jesus said and did. He said—“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” It is equally interesting to know what Christ said in reply. Did He waver? Did He hesitate? No—now was the time to come out with a straight answer—right to the point. Christ said—“Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee but my Father which is in heaven”—Matthew 16:13-17; Mark 8:27-38; Luke 9:18-27.

In commenting on His own reply Jesus goes farther and claims that He will come—“In the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works”—Matthew 16:27. Surely Peter understood his Lord.

The Loss and Recovery of Peter's Faith.—The Scriptures would not be what they are if they did not record faithfully all that took place. Peter is human and has all the failings of humanity. Christ had told him with the other apostles that He must

go up to Jerusalem and be crucified and raised the third day. Again and again had He said this. But when the time drew near and Jesus did go up to Jerusalem and stood trial for His physical life Peter no doubt was in a daze. Everything that He had stood for was tumbling. It did not seem possible—it could not be possible—that Jesus would allow Himself to be placed on trial for His life. And yet He did—just as He had told His apostles. But Peter was crushed and denied his Master—forgetting that Christ said he would deny Him—Matthew 26:62-75.

But here Peter differs from many who, when they deny, do nothing. Peter went out and wept bitterly. It was a sad time for Peter until after the resurrection of Christ.

Peter is Very Prominent in the resurrection scenes of Jesus Christ—Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20 and 21. In this prominence it is shown how fully Peter is forgiven and how fully he is reinstated in the love of his Master.

In the Acts of the Apostles, while Jesus is the object of all that is said and done, Peter takes the lead for the first twelve chapters. In the eighth verse of the first chapter Christ sets forth Christianity's program and progress—"Ye shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, in Judæa and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

It is Peter who directs in the choice of an apostle to take the place of Judas the traitor—Acts 1:15-26.

It is Peter who preaches the first sermon after Christ's ascension—Acts 2:1-40.

It is Peter who organizes the first Christian Church with about three thousand members—Acts 2:41.

It is Peter who dares to go into the Temple and tell the people and the priests how they had wrongfully killed “the Prince of Life and Glory” and that salvation is only through Him. This is a very, very different Peter from the one who denied his Master only a short time ago—Acts 3 and 4.

It is in this period that the Christian Church is set up, upon its feet, the ordinances instituted and the first deacons chosen.

It is in this period that the Church has its first martyr in Stephen and its first persecution under Saul—Acts 7 and 8.

It is now that the first missionary enterprises go out into Judæa and Samaria—Acts 8 to 12.

It is right here, in these first twelve chapters, under Peter’s guiding hand, that we have the beginnings of the “Great Christian Enterprises” that have filled the world.

Peter has surely come a long way on “the Upward Way.”

He is “the Ascending Man” not for himself only but to help others to ascend out of the valley of sin, humiliation, trouble and despair to the sunny highlands of God’s love and care.

Read the First Epistle of Peter and note how he tries to cheer and comfort all who are depressed and downhearted. How he tries to make every one feel, as he feels, about the Christ.

Back of all Peter is, what he is, because he believes

in his Master, Jesus Christ, and in striving to make Him known to others.

Characteristics. He was a splendid judge of values, of his Lord, of his fellow men, of things worth while. He was courageous in preaching Christ right where he had made his slip in his denial. He was exceedingly bold in talking to men who had crucified the Christ—he did not go away off somewhere to say what he had to say. He did not wait for others but he took the lead, in doing good, because some one had to take it and it seemed to fall to him. His motto seemed to be—"Forget your mistakes. Get on with your doing good."

Questions.—What can be said of the way of a man—up or down? What can be said of Peter—the fisherman? What of Peter—the disciple? Peter—the apostle of the first place—give some reasons for his appointment. What can be said of Peter's loss and recovery of his faith? Give instances of Peter's leadership in the Acts of the Apostles. State some of his characteristics.

XXI

PAUL

THE MAN WHO BETTERED CITY CONDITIONS

Seeking New Fields of Work.—With the opening of the thirteenth chapter of the Acts a new and important era in the story of Christianity begins. Barnabas and Saul (afterwards known as Paul) are called to new fields of work by the Holy Ghost—Acts 13: 1–4. Barnabas drops out, after a while, and Paul is left to carry on the greatest and most strenuous missionary enterprise the world has ever seen.

Why this insistent call to advance and conquer new territory? There were doubtless those who said, in those days, “We have done well. Why trouble ourselves? See how much has been accomplished in the revival on the day of Pentecost and in the preaching of the Gospel in Judæa and Samaria, in Antioch and other cities. We may now, since so much has been done in such a short time, rest from our labours.” But this was not evidently the mind of the Holy Ghost. The pressing and stressing of the cause of the Christ was wanted even in places where there seemed little prospect of success.

This is not only a call of the past. It is the Divine Call to-day. Any enterprise to live—much more to succeed—must be constantly seeking new ways for expansion. It cannot depend upon past successes—

no matter how great—or upon an acquired momentum. Men, of all sorts and kinds, and institutions, of all sorts and kinds, go down because the advance work is not pressed. We sometimes wonder what is the matter with our churches that they do not grow. Is not this the trouble that no advance work is pressed? The Spirit of the Lord has not departed but the urgency to new and difficult work is unheeded. If Paul had said—"Surely there is enough work to be done here in Antioch and we have had a great success; let us be satisfied," then he would never have been heard of by us in this far-off age. It was his willingness to go ahead, in spite of difficulties, that made him. With the Church of the past, so to-day, it is "Grow or Go."

The Drive for the Betterment of the Big Cities.—The big city has been the problem of all times—politically, industrially, socially, morally, religiously and in countless other ways. Its very bigness makes it difficult to handle. Its poverty grows more dire, and the insolence of riches more insolent, as the city enlarges. Its evils multiply and fester and breed corruption as the population increases. One great difference between the cities of the first century—which Paul visited and worked with—and the cities of Christian countries of to-day is the way in which they handled the vice problem. Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, and the others, put no check whatever upon moral viciousness. On the other hand they encouraged it. They sought to make it attractive. They gilded it, enshrining it in their temples. Read Romans—1:21-32—as a sample of this sort of thing

which is depicted in all of Paul's letters. As appropriations were made for streets and public buildings so also public moneys were set aside for the support and encouragement of immoral institutions. Such a course was thought to make the city attractive.

Paul preaching Christ and purity of heart and life was up against a tremendous problem. All his letters show this. He taught that the betterment of the city must begin in cleansing it of moral viciousness. He saw a beauty of art and a perfection in architecture in Ephesus, Corinth and Athens which is unequalled to-day, but he saw that it had been made possible by unpaid slave labour and was used to debase men's souls. He had no eyes for this beauty of art or architecture, not because he did not see it but because he saw the debasement of the moral image in man. He was intent upon restoring, in man, the image of God in Jesus Christ. If a plague is devastating a city a doctor has no time to observe the beauty of adornment of the houses to which he is called. Paul had no controversy with beautiful things, as things, but he was more concerned with the adornment of the soul in the beauty of purity and righteousness.

We are still struggling with this primary problem. It is the greatest of them all. Get this settled right and all the others are settled.

We can credit to Paul and his heed, of the call of the Holy Ghost, that cities in Christian countries at least do not strive to foster, or appropriate public funds to make moral vice attractive. They repress it. They put it under cover. As the city becomes

more Christian it roots it out. But the best way is the way of Paul to have men so much interested in Christ that vicious things cease to attract. The more we see of Paul the more we admire his courage in attacking the big city strongholds of vice. The great thing is that the attack was successful. The Church needs to heed the Divine Call to-day.

Paul—the Leader.—Paul is the principal character in the Acts from the thirteenth chapter to the close as Peter is in the first twelve chapters. The Holy Spirit who is mentioned over fifty times in this book is the director of activities. See Acts 1:8; 2:1-4; 13:1-4; 16:6-10, etc. The splendid growth of the Church was made possible by heeding the Divine Calls.

Qualifications of Paul.—Judged, as a man, by his record he is one of the very great characters, not only in the Bible but in all history. As a thinker he has few if any equals. As a writer his works stand preëminent. As a man of action, he, with small equipment, accomplished the largest results. He stirred cities as no man has ever stirred them. He had a strong and pleasing personality. He believed that his Master was the great regenerating force in the world. When he got to Corinth and saw there, what he had not seen before, the worst vices of the east meeting the worst of the west and mingling to make a perpetual festival of moral viciousness he declared his helplessness, himself, to handle the situation and determined, as he afterwards wrote the Corinthians—1 Corinthians 2:2—"Not to know

anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified."

He was a native of Tarsus in Cilicia—Acts 22: 3ff. and 21: 39. This city had a large commerce. It was one of the three big university centers ranking with Athens and Alexandria. It was morally corrupt having a "Special Baal worship of an imposing but unspeakably degrading character."

He was a Pharisee Jew, as his father was—Acts 23: 6; Philippians 3: 5—and a free-born Roman citizen—Acts 22: 25, 28.

He had a good education upon which the finishing touches were put in Jerusalem under the great teacher Gamaliel—Acts 22: 3.

He seems to have been well acquainted with Greek philosophy and literature. He quotes from the Greek poets—Aratus, Epimenides and Menander.

He was a tent maker by trade, as every Jew boy had to learn a trade—Acts 18: 3; 20: 34; 1 Corinthians 4: 12; 1 Thessalonians 2: 9; 2 Thessalonians 3: 8.

The Persecutor.—Paul first appears—in Acts 7: 58–60 and 8: 1–4—at the martyrdom of Stephen and as the arch persecutor of the Christians for whom he had no mercy, hunting them out in their homes. He seems to have been absent from Jerusalem, after completing his studies, all through the time of the preaching of John Baptist and Jesus.

Conversion.—We open the book of Acts to 8: 1–4 and 9: 1, 2 and we find "Saul . . . breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord."

Again we open this book to 9:19, 20 and we read—"Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues that he is the Son of God."

What has happened? There is only one answer and that is that he has had a remarkable conversion, which is described in Acts 9:3-18. This is the story as Luke tells it. Paul delighted to tell the story over and over again of his conversion. Various attempts have been made to explain away this conversion but they are more difficult to believe than the narrative itself. Read what Paul said about it—Galatians 1:11-17; Acts 22:6-16; 26:12-18. Paul believed that his Master had spoken to him. And he delighted to serve Him ever afterwards.

The Ten Years' Preparation for his work. The narrative in Acts runs so smoothly that we sometimes fail to take note of the lapse of time between important events. As a result of Paul's conversion the Jews tried to kill him and the Christians were afraid of him. After doing some work he seems to have spent much time, about ten years, in getting ready for what was afterwards his great missionary task. We are told by Paul what took place during some of this period of preparation—Galatians 1:15-24—and that he was in Arabia, in Damascus, in Jerusalem, Syria and Cilicia. The study of the Scriptures, the prayer and meditation of this ten year period helped Paul greatly afterwards.

The Three Great Missionary Journeys (Acts 13:1-21:16).—When the period of preparation is

ended we find Paul at Antioch where he has been brought, from Tarsus, by Barnabas—Acts 11:25, 26. Here he remained a year before the call came to his world-wide task—Acts 13:1-4.

The influence that the great missionary tours have had upon the history of mankind cannot be over-estimated.

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To Sum Up.—In about thirty years the Gospel of Jesus Christ has been preached all over the Roman Empire. It has separated itself from Judaism and become the Great World Religion, just as Christ desired—Matthew 28:19, 20; Luke 24:46-48. It has proved its power to overcome sin and evil in the greatest cities of its time.

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Questions.—What can be said about the Gospel seeking new fields of work—why this insistent call to advance? What may be said about the drive for the betterment of cities—in what does this betterment consist? What can be said of Paul as a leader? What about his qualifications? The persecutor? What can be said of Paul's conversion? The ten years' preparation? What can be said of the three missionary journeys—From Jerusalem to Rome—Letters of Paul—The sum up?

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